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# Spiritual

## Retrieving Early Religious Memories

by Reverend Louis J. Cameli, STD

A catechist or teacher who embarks on the task of the faith formation of children in grades 1 and 2 embraces a challenging task! It means entering the minds and processes that belong to these young children.

While many of us began our faith formation as young children, we have since moved forward in our lives and our learning. A review of the presuppositions and methods appropriate for these grade levels is necessary in order to provide an effective catechesis for these young children. This review is a kind of spiritual retrieval that catechists and teachers must make as they prepare to fulfill their responsibilities for the children.

I would suggest that there is deep within us a primordial religious experience that has remained foundational for us from the time we were six or seven years old. That experience involved a direct contact with the mystery of God present in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me explain by way of a biblical illustration.

One of the most extraordinary events depicted in Matthew's Gospel is the visit of the Magi to the newborn Jesus. It is, by the way, one of the dearest stories to young children. Perhaps we can enter into the scene with fresh eyes, the eyes of children. By doing so we can prepare ourselves spiritually to pursue the teaching method specific for this age group.

The story of the Magi's visit encompasses a complex political situation, especially Herod's jealousy about competition from a newborn "King of the Jews." Theologically, the story embraces major and significant themes of the universal value of Jesus as the Light of all the nations, the Savior of all peoples. The actual encounter of Jesus and the Magi is far less complicated and far more direct.

*Our early religious experiences remain foundational throughout our lives.*

# Reflection

When they enter the house, according to Matthew, the Magi found the child with Mary his mother. Consider this scene for a moment. Re-create it in your mind's eye. Mary holds the child up and out toward the visiting Magi. She presents him, and they behold him. It is a very direct and unencumbered encounter. The very directness of their meeting brings joy to their hearts and an immediate response of generous gift giving.

Early in our lives, we had such a direct presentation of the Lord to us. Somehow that experience has remained foundational for the rest of our lives of faith. In dealing with young children, whatever the particulars of method, we are engaged in re-creating a direct presentation or encounter with the Lord. If we are to do that well and effectively, it will certainly be important for us to retrieve that kind of foundational experience from our own journey of faith.

As unlikely as it might seem at first, we can come to find common and holy ground with these children entrusted to our care. It centers on a very direct meeting with the Lord who opens our hearts in joy and generosity to receive him.

## For Reflection

- What sense of Jesus did you have when you were six or seven years old?
- How does your earliest impression of Jesus affect your relationship with him today?

**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*

**Spirit of God**, we give you thanks and praise  
for the blessings you give us today through family and friends.

Guide us as we prepare to be your catechists.  
Help us see **your constant activity** in our world  
so that we may lead our learners to you.

Today, guide us to see you  
in the **unconditional love** of parents,  
in the **spontaneous joy** of children,  
in the **wisdom** of all who have gone before us,  
in the **wonder** of new life all around us,  
in the special **call to teach**,  
in **quiet meditation** on your teaching,  
in our **compassionate service** to others.

Help us recognize you in all our daily activities  
so that all those we teach may see in us  
your **love and concern** for the world's people  
and be moved to take up the work  
of **building your kingdom** here on earth.

*Amen!*



# Overview: Methods for Grades 1 and 2

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 young 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 pages 6 and 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 six or seven 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 life journey of faith
- **Sharing Sacred Scripture:** Suggestions for using Scripture in catechesis
- **Sharing Our Catholic Tradition:** Ideas for introducing the Catholic Tradition to young children in ways that will help them to build faith concepts as they grow

- **Praying in the Classroom:** A reflection on the importance of 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.

**Barbara Kay Bowie** was a teacher, principal, catechist, early childhood writer and consultant, and college professor during her forty-five-year career. She writes on early childhood and religious topics for children, parents, and teachers and frequently speaks at local and national conventions. She is the president of Educational Expertise, LLC, that trains parents and teachers of young children in religious education and readiness skills. She holds a BA in Elementary Education from the College of Notre Dame and an MA and EdD from the Catholic University of America in Curriculum and Instruction.

# Sharing Sacred Scripture

Stories capture the religious imagination of young children. Appropriate Scripture narratives and related children's literature nourish the faith of six- and seven-year-olds. As we retell the stories over and over again, children think about God and the events of the Bible in concrete ways. As we talk about the stories with them, they develop a language to describe their wonder at God. This segment will help you appreciate the importance of Sacred Scripture in catechesis.

## Goal

To demonstrate suitable ways to use Bible stories, related children's literature, and activities to build faith understanding

## Learning Objectives

- To describe activities that involve learners in retelling stories from the Bible
- To recognize that contemporary stories can reinforce faith themes
- To choose appropriate storytelling techniques for catechesis

## Exercise

Take a few moments to reflect on the following questions. Then discuss them with another person or with a group.

What Bible stories do you remember from your childhood? Why do they remain with you today?

## Prayer

*God of life and love, in your goodness and wisdom you disclose yourself to us through the Sacred Scriptures. Give me the creativity to help your word come alive to the young people in my care so that they will respond to you in faith. I ask this in the name of your Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

# Looking Ahead

This segment demonstrates how to introduce children to Scripture stories in ways that will help them remember and understand them 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.

**By the power of  
the Holy Spirit,  
Christ must be  
proclaimed to  
every person  
and to all  
nations in every  
age so that  
God's Revelation  
may reach  
the ends of  
the earth.**

NDC 16B

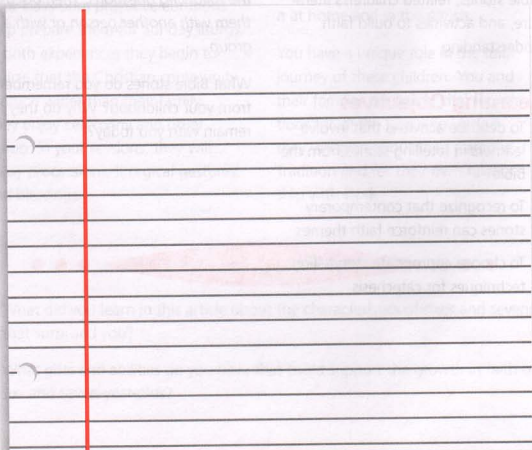
Watch Segment 2  
of the DVD  
or CD-ROM now.

## Video Outline

- A catechist's discussion of the importance of discovery and engagement in catechesis
- The use of role-playing to assist in the retelling and remembering of Scripture stories
- Devices the catechists use to hold the children's attention
- Examples of the importance of involving students in their own learning

## Comments and Questions

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



# 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. Describe the ways the catechists involved their learners in the retelling of the stories?
2. What could the children in the video learn about God's love from the Scripture stories used by the catechists?
3. What storytelling techniques did you observe in this video segment? Which ones would you like to incorporate into your own use of story in catechesis?

## Remember . . .

**Use Scripture and other stories.**



**Involve learners in storytelling.**



**Reinforce with concrete activities.**



**Use gestures and questions.**



**Encourage group interaction.**



**Respect your learners.**



# Looking Beyond

Using a variety of strategies to reinforce Scripture stories helps children deepen their understanding of the stories. The exercise below will help you develop strategies for building meaning through Scripture stories.

**Children need to learn how to wonder in religious education so they can “enter” religious language rather than merely repeat it or talk about it.**

Jerome Berryman,  
*Godly Play*

## PRACTICE FOR CATECHISTS

### Building Meaning through Scripture Stories

Through play children expand their faith language and build meaning about God. Recall the parable of the mustard seed. (See Matthew 13:31–32.) Give an example of a role-play, a song, or another activity that would engage your learners with this parable and reinforce its meaning. Explain how you would process and summarize the activity.

#### 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 Gospel storytelling.

# Scripture Storytelling

by Barbara Kay Bowie

All children love stories. Sixes and sevens are attracted to the drama and vivid images in good stories that stir their imagination. Children are also attracted to the goodness they see in particular characters or actions. All of these images increase the store of knowledge as children attempt to make sense of their world.

Scripture stories provide children with vivid examples of everyday happenings. Dinner is served, storms rage, festivals are celebrated, births are anticipated, deaths are mourned, and God is shown to be present in all. The images and language of God, Jesus, and God's people are imprinted in young minds each time a biblical story is read or told. These stories provide images for children as they begin to develop answers to Moses' question to God, "What is your name?" and to Jesus' question to the Apostles, "Who do you say that I am?"

For first graders, the story of God's creation of the world is one of the first stories they will hear. Each time they listen or retell the story, they recall that God made the world and that everything God made is good.

Repetition of the story over the years guides the children to the underlying message that God loves them with an everlasting love and wants them to care for all creation.

Second graders are introduced more fully to stories about Jesus. Through these stories and the simpler parables he used in his teaching, they begin to hear Jesus' message of the Father's love and forgiveness. Both sixes and sevens identify with the stories of searching for the lost sheep, feeding the hungry people, forgiving the good thief, planting a seed, and searching for a lost coin.

Each time these stories are repeated, children are being drawn into the mystery of Jesus' life and message. While they cannot understand the mystery of this person who is both human and divine, through these stories they are building concrete images of what the Son of God said and did upon which later meaning can grow. When they ask questions about the story, discuss possible answers and ask them what *they*

*Gospel stories draw children into the mystery of Jesus' life and message.*

think the answer might be. This allows them to express their wonder and awe at the story of God they are hearing.

With practice it is easy to develop the techniques that bring the characters and message of the Scripture story alive. Read the story prayerfully yourself and then retell it in your own words. An enthusiastic and expressive voice, appropriate gestures, and props help hold the children's attention and reinforce learning. There are beautifully illustrated Scripture storybooks available today that stimulate imagination and help the child visualize the world of the story. Examine the illustrations carefully, however, to make sure they are appropriate for small children.

Using Scripture stories in simple prayer services helps children respond with praise and thanksgiving to the wonderful stories of God. Enthroned the Bible or children's lectionary in your prayer center and read the stories reverently from it when you use them in liturgical prayer. You will then be modeling for them the way in which they will encounter the Word of God in the Sunday Eucharist.

Choose Scripture stories carefully for children of this age. Minimize the use of miracle stories, which may paint God or Jesus as a magician who can grant every wish. The story of the death and resurrection of Jesus is so central to our faith that it must be shared during the seasons of Lent and Easter. With this exception, however, avoid focusing on stories that describe natural disasters, inexplicable suffering, or God's anger or severe judgment on the people. The children will be unable to place these stories within the wider context of God's ultimate mercy and forgiveness. Naturally, children will hear such stories in the Sunday readings. When they arise, always emphasize God's saving presence in the story. Never describe God to young children as the bearer of misfortune. Every story has its proper time and place. At this age, concentrate in your catechesis on the stories of God's love and care.

How blessed you are that many of the children you teach will be hearing these great stories of Sacred Scripture for the first time. If you tell them well, these stories will lay the cornerstone within your learners for a lifetime of faith.

### *For Reflection*

- Think of a time when you heard a Scripture story told in a powerful way. What was the story and why did it have such a powerful effect on you?
- What did you learn in this article that could make you a more effective storyteller?