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# Spiritual

## Encountering the Concepts of Faith

by Reverend Louis J. Cameli, STD

As you help the young people deepen their knowledge and experience of faith, you must naturally identify those methods and approaches that are appropriate for the age and experience level of the young people whom you will assist. At the same time, be aware that these approaches are part of the journey and process of faith itself. The very same steps that the young people have taken and continue to take are the steps and foundations that you have taken in your own faith life. So, it is essential that you retrieve your own roots in faith in order to help children grow.

The youngest children have come in contact with a very direct experience of the God who is manifest in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. They encounter him directly and without much elaboration. Children who are a bit older, say in third and fourth grade, deepen their experience by understanding it in some of the signs and symbols that convey their faith's experience for them. As children mature, they become more capable of conceptual thought. Thus, the ideas of faith and the conceptualization of faith need attention.

That same unfolding from direct experience through signs and symbols to conceptualization occurs in us as well. These various "steps" of faith that unfold on the faith journey remain with us, even as we progress in other ways. It is profitable to recall and retrieve these elements ourselves in order to assist the children. Then our teaching or our catechesis is not simply an attempt to apply principles to the classroom setting, but rather becomes a personal sharing of our faith with the children. Faith speaks to faith—the most effective and most genuine pattern of faith formation.

Consider this example from Saint Mark's Gospel (Mark 2:23–28). One Sabbath Jesus and his disciples are walking through a field of grain. The disciples were hungry and they began to pick heads of grain. The Pharisees are critical, condemning Jesus and his disciples for breaking the Sabbath by harvesting the wheat. Jesus responds with an example from the Old Testament. He

*As children mature, they become more capable of conceptual thought.*

# Reflection

concludes with reasoning about faith and observance and his own role, when he says, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath” (Mark 2:27–28).

In this example, Jesus works out the logic of faith—its meaning and its consequences. He opens up for the Pharisees and for his own disciples the meaning of the law and his very own identity as the Son of Man. As people of faith, we understand this as the development of faith. Beyond basic foundational experiences, beyond the light that is cast by signs and symbols, there is for us a great importance attached to the ideas and the logic of faith—the conceptualization of its implications and consequences.

When you work with young people in the fifth and sixth grades, you enter a world in which conceptualization about many things is beginning. It is no less important in the realm of faith. By your own self-awareness of the importance that conceptualization and reasoning have played in your own journey, you can engage the appropriate method that will allow you to foster this emerging level of faith development in fifth and sixth graders.



## For Reflection

- What is your first memory of thinking about your faith on a conceptual level?
- What has been your response when you have discovered seeming contradictions in the story of faith?

**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

**Creator God,**

throughout the human journey  
you invite us to be both learners and teachers.

The **ministry of catechesis** is an opportunity you offer  
to help us explore the **talent and abilities**  
with which you have gifted each of us.

It also expresses our **commitment**  
to be **faith-filled followers** of Jesus Christ,  
sharing the Good News creatively and energetically with others.

You have called us to **reach out** to young people  
as they struggle to learn who they are and where they belong—  
in their **families**, in the **Christian community**, in the **world**.

Help us remember that you have blessed each of them  
with delightful, challenging **uniqueness**  
to share with the world today and in the future.

By our example as **people of faith**  
and through our catechetical efforts  
help them **mature** in faith and **grow** in knowledge.  
As you call us to be **instruments of your care** and concern,  
we humbly invite you to form us in this ministry.

Through Jesus Christ, Savior and Brother,  
and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*Amen.*

# Overview: **Methods for Grades 5 and 6**

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 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 ten or eleven 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
- **Growing as a Catholic Christian:** Ideas for introducing the Catholic Tradition to young children 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

One of the principal concerns of ten- and eleven-year-olds is the need to belong. At this age being accepted as a member of the Catholic community is a formative experience. Tens and elevens are trying to understand what being a Catholic is like. They engage well with learning activities that offer details of the structure and life of the Church and the responsibilities of the members of the Church. At this age young people are able to understand the rituals and daily practice of being Catholic. They need to be challenged to think independently and creatively about who they are and what gifts and talents they and their families can contribute to the Church. This segment will show you ways to help them grow in their Catholic identity.

## Goal

To demonstrate ways to help learners build a deeper understanding of their faith

## Learning Objectives

- To give examples of ways in which young people deepen their understanding of belonging to the Christian community
- To express the importance of allowing tens and elevens to relate their thoughts and ideas about the faith tradition
- To describe concrete activities that help young people understand the symbols of our faith

## Exercise

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

Who were the people who helped you learn what it means to be a Catholic Christian? Why did their actions or words make such a lasting impression?

## 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.*

# 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.

**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

- Activities that help catechists get to know their learners
- The use of activities that help students engage with faith concepts
- The reflections of catechists describing their rationale in developing certain activities

## 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. Recall the role-play of the Anointing of the Sick in the video. What could the young people learn about the importance of members of the faith community supporting one another?
2. The catechists in the video allow the kids to engage in creative self-expression/self-reflection. Why is this important? What strategies have you used to help young people express their ideas and feelings?
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 . . .

- Use journals to express feelings.
- Invite learners to name their experiences.
- Reinforce the concept of community.
- Connect family experiences with Scripture.
- Encourage creative expression.
- Use drama to involve learners.
- Teach the meaning of symbols through activities.
- Give experiences of ritual symbols and actions.



# Looking Beyond

Planning activities that promote community is essential for ten- and eleven-year-olds to feel a sense of belonging. This exercise will help you plan an appropriate activity that will help tens and elevens appreciate the importance of the faith community.

## PRACTICE FOR CATECHISTS

### Experiencing the Christian Community

A fifth grade catechist is planning a lesson on the Body of Christ. Help her design a cooperative learning activity that would allow young people to experience the strength of participating in the Body of Christ through working together to accomplish their goal.

Goal:

Strategy:

### 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.*

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

NDC 29B



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

# Building Faith Concepts

by Dolores Henchy

Tens and elevens are energetic and curious. They have a thirst for knowledge and they love to solve problems. While they are growing in many ways, they remain concrete thinkers. Constructing learning activities that relate to learners' interests arouses curiosity and makes faith come alive. Connecting these activities to faith concepts enables tens and elevens to go beyond rote memorization to an internalized experience of the Catholic faith.

## **Use activities to teach Scripture.**

Tens and elevens have developed a sense of past, present, and future and are ready for a more comprehensive introduction to the stories and themes of Scripture. Activities that help them put events in sequence support their developing sense of history. Invite learners to construct colorful timelines of key events in their lives, and then develop similar timelines for the life of Jesus or key historical events of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Another way to increase familiarity with Scripture is through analysis of one of the Gospels. Divide one of the Gospels into sections. Tens and elevens

are interested in the historical Jesus. Invite small groups to select two or three events from their Gospel section about the life of Jesus. Encourage the learners to depict these events through drawings, dioramas, or collages. They can construct a timeline of Jesus' life by putting the Gospel events in order. Each group can mark the appropriate locations on a map and report on the events they picked.

Use a regular Bible with children of this age to affirm their more developed reading and thinking skills and to familiarize them with the biblical language they hear in the Sunday readings. You could begin each class by inviting a student to read a short Scripture passage relating to the day's topic. Invite learners to reflect in their journals about these passages. They enjoy using simple poetic forms such as the cinquain. They can, for example, create a cinquain around the name of a biblical character, such as Abraham, Peter, or Mary Magdalene.

## **Use activities to teach faith**

**concepts.** Tens and elevens have a keen interest in facts, reasons, and how things are organized. This is an

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*Tens and elevens have developed a sense of past, present, and future.*

opportune time to invite them to research Church organization, sacraments, and the liturgical seasons. Let them interview the pastor or other parish ministers about their roles.

Encourage the students to participate in the celebration of a sacrament with their families, such as a Baptism, Marriage, Holy Orders, or Anointing of the Sick, and report back to the class what they observed. After two or three young people have observed or participated in a particular sacrament, ask them to construct a mobile depicting the signs, symbols, and ritual actions pertinent to that sacrament.

Introduce the liturgical calendar and liturgical seasons. Provide resources for the students to investigate colors, signs, symbols, and functions of each liturgical season. Incorporate these colors and symbols into the classroom prayer center. Invite learners to design

and create banners appropriate to the liturgical season to bring home and share with their families.

Tens and elevens can research great men and women from the Catholic tradition. Have the learners make booklets illustrating the lives and works of these great personalities and then exchange the booklets with each other. They will also enjoy dramatizing events from the lives of these men and women.

Ten- and eleven-year-olds are ready to move beyond facts and statements of principles to Christian living in action. They are eager to participate in a variety of applications of the Gospel, from creating a peaceable classroom to imagining the practical shape of a world of justice and peace. By participating in a dynamic learning environment, they can become a genuine faith community as they respond to the message of Jesus.

### *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?