

JOE PAPROCKI AND  
JULIANNE STANZ

# THE CATECHIST'S BACKPACK



SPIRITUAL  
ESSENTIALS  
FOR THE JOURNEY

BY JOE PAPROCKI, DMin.  
AND JULIANNE STANZ

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FOR THE JOURNEY

LOYOLAPRESS.  
A JESUIT MINISTRY  

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Chicago

## LOYOLA PRESS.

A JESUIT MINISTRY

3441 N. Ashland Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60657  
(800) 621-1008  
www.loyolapress.com

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*Cover and interior design by Loyola Press*

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ISBN-13: 978-0-8294-4246-5

ISBN-10: 0-8294-4246-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014955517

Printed in the United States of America

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 RRD/USA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## DEDICATION

*Dedicated to the memory of Lee Nagel, a master catechist who  
spiritually filled the backpacks of so many with his lively stories,  
booming laughter and infectious sense of joy.*



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people: Arlene Astrowski and Deb Breakey, two excellent catechetical leaders, who allowed me to practice my catechetical craft at their respective parishes for a number of years; Maureen, my spiritual director, for supplying me with what I need for my spiritual backpack; Doug Hall for his wonderful cartoons; my wife, Jo, and my kids, Mike and Amy, for their nurturing love.

Joe Paprocki

To the many catechetical leaders, especially those in the Diocese of Green Bay, who mentor and encourage me: thank you for your guidance and patience. To the family and friends who support and nourish me: thank you for your help and kindness. To my rock, my husband Wayne, for his unwavering confidence in me and for his dedication to our family: thank you for your love.

Julianne Stanz



## INTRODUCTION

**Catechists must have a deep spirituality, i.e. they must live in the Spirit, who will help them to renew themselves continually in their specific identity.**  
—*Guide for Catechists, no. 6*

Backpacking is a fun, healthy, and physically challenging way to enjoy a journey of discovery. Setting off on a new adventure can bring all sorts of surprises, opportunities, and challenges. Through the journey itself, we acquire new insights and deeper understanding, and we often arrive at our destination energized and strengthened. Of course, anyone setting forth on a backpacking journey knows that there are many things to take into consideration and certain necessities that need to be packed. You have to choose a location and take into account its geography and inherent dangers. You need to bring along a compass, GPS, or maps; a water supply; first aid kit; proper clothing and footwear; nutritional and nonperishable foods; personal hygiene items; supplies and equipment; and sunscreen and bug spray. All these items can help ensure that your journey will be as fulfilling and enjoyable as possible.

In a similar way, catechists are engaged in a stimulating and challenging faith journey of discovery. Without the proper essentials for this spiritual journey, a catechist can run the risk of encountering fatigue, obstacles, frustrations, and even danger, all of which threaten to reduce the enjoyment and fulfillment of the journey or possibly cut it short. Suffice it to say, catechists require certain spiritual resources that enable them not only to endure the journey but to thrive on it.



"After three weeks of enjoying the church's services, prayer, fellowship, and counseling, I still feel a deep spiritual yearning. So I'm going to sue your socks off."

This means that, in addition to acquiring teaching techniques, learning strategies, and sharpening methodologies, we must also be tending to our spirituality. As catechists, we are not teachers of a subject, but rather witnesses to a living person: Jesus Christ. As such, we are called to cultivate that relationship and to share that relationship with others. These actions—both the cultivation and the sharing of our relationship with Christ—make up our spirituality.

## What Is Spirituality?

In general, spirituality refers to how humans experience and nurture their relationship with God. Every human being has a spirituality. Christian spirituality relates to God in and through Jesus Christ. When it is actively pursued, spirituality is a path to holiness. Now, while the spiritual lives of all Christians share certain characteristics, a person's particular spirituality is unique. It is influenced by the person's education, formation, gender, geographical location, age, ethnic background, and so on. Thus we can speak of spiritualities that are Celtic, Ignatian, Dominican, Hispanic, and pre-Vatican II, just to name a few. By the same token, a person's spirituality is influenced by his or her vocation or state in life. A married person has a different spirituality than a celibate priest or nun. A single person's spiritual life expresses itself differently than that of a married person. So to some extent, every person's spirituality is unique because each of us is a unique human being.

With that in mind, we can talk about the spirituality of the catechist. When we speak of catechists in this book, we are referring to all those who facilitate faith formation with children, youth, young adults, or adults in general. Did you know that being a catechist is a vocation? The word *vocation* comes from the Latin word *vocatio*, meaning “to call” or “to summon.” The summons to be a catechist is no less than a call or a summons from God! It's possible that you have not considered this. Few of us have experienced an epiphany that caused us to go to our parish one day and declare that God has called us to be a catechist. Many of us came into the ministry of catechesis through an unexpected conversation, phone call, or e-mail. But God often speaks to us in unique ways—which is why it makes perfect sense that catechists are called to develop a spirituality that's unique to catechists.

## **I Couldn't Believe It!**

Christine's three children were in middle school religious education. She often engaged the director of religious education, Anne, in conversation about what her children were learning in class and how they were talking about this at home. One day Anne asked Christine to be a catechist. "I couldn't believe it," Christine said, "I felt so honored and humbled that Anne, whom I trusted and admired, would think I was capable of passing along my faith to others. At first I said no, but the more I thought about it, the more excited I became. If it wasn't for Anne seeing something special in me, I would never have considered that I had the necessary gifts for becoming a catechist.

—Julianne

Christine's story is familiar to many of us. Some of us were asked by a pastor, a parish catechetical leader, or one of our children to consider helping out in a parish faith formation program. These people recognized in us the potential and the gifts necessary to be a catechist, even if we ourselves had yet to recognize them. Wanting to be of service, we agreed—perhaps tentatively at first. We took a leap of faith because we trusted the person who asked us to be of service. But then, somehow, our one-year commitment became two, and two years grew into five.

Somewhere along the way we realized that we loved sharing our faith with those we serve. We realized that in preparing for our classes we were growing in our understanding and love of Jesus Christ and the church. These were possibly the first stirrings of our vocation as catechists.

**If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.**

—JEREMIAH 20:9

## **Six Non-Negotiables**

Because of our vocation, we catechists are called to embark on a unique spiritual journey. In order to thrive on this journey, we need to carry some key spiritual resources in our catechist's backpack. These spiritual resources



are identified and explored in the *Guide for Catechists* (1993). This document, issued by the Vatican office called the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, describes the spirituality of the catechist, which is grounded in the spirituality of the laity and flows from the sacrament of baptism. In a nutshell, a catechist's spirituality is marked by these six characteristics:

1. Openness to God
2. Openness to the church
3. Openness to the world
4. Authenticity of life
5. Missionary zeal
6. Devotion to Mary

These six characteristics serve as the focus of this book. To show how each one is essential for the catechist's journey, we compare it to an item that is essential for backpacking. Here is a quick look at these items for the journey.

#### **+ Radical Reliance on God: An Abundant Supply of Water**

Every backpacker knows that without water, a person cannot survive. Water is the source of life and the most essential resource to include in one's backpack. Catechists, likewise, recognize their spiritual source of life: God! The spiritual journey is sustained primarily by an abundant supply of Living Water—God's own life within us. Catechists are called to a radical reliance on God and learn to quench their thirst for God on a daily basis. This is a reliance on a *living* Word—a person—whom we recognize as the source of all life. We desire deeply to enter into intimacy with God and to invite others to do the same. Our desire is to be transformed by this life-giving relationship and to invite others to this saving and sustaining transformation.

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**We desire deeply  
to enter into  
intimacy with God  
and to invite others  
to do the same.**

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#### **+ Commitment to the Church: Adequate Food and Shelter**

In order to be sustained on the journey, a backpacker needs an adequate supply of nutritional food as well as the tools and utensils needed to

prepare that food. Our call to serve as catechists comes from the church, which is the source of our nourishment and provides us with the tools we need to access that nourishment and to share it with others. We're not self-reliant; we are sent on a mission and nourished along the way by the church. Having been called to serve as catechists, we're nourished by the church and empowered to bring that nourishment to others.

- + Openness to the World: A Topographical Map** When backpacking, it's helpful to have a topographical map, a field guide, or a navigational system that familiarizes hikers with the geography and terrain they are about to traverse. It helps to know about wildlife and plant life in the area as well as opportunities and dangers that may be encountered along the way. As catechists, we need to familiarize ourselves with the "terrain" of this world. The Holy Spirit was poured forth so that we could proclaim the gospel to all nations. This serves as our map, compass, and ultimately our "GPSS"—our global positioning spiritual system. Without such a tool we would wander aimlessly, without direction. With it, we can stay in touch with the field in which the seeds of the gospel are to be sown: the world. We are called, however, not simply to immerse ourselves in the world but to survey it, engage it, and challenge it so that it may be transformed in and through Christ.

**+ Consistency and Authenticity: The Right Clothing and Footwear**

Few things can ruin a backpacking adventure like inadequate clothing and footwear can. In order to withstand the elements, navigate difficult terrain, and maintain a good pace, a backpacker needs appropriate clothing and sturdy, supportive shoes. This is no time to "make do" with your old sneakers and T-shirts. You want gear that's made for the job! As catechists, too, we need the proper attire to withstand life's ever-changing terrain. In this case, the proper attire is our true being, which is Christ himself. By virtue of our baptism, we have "put on" Christ and become a member of his body. In other words, being a catechist is not a hat that we put on and take off as we please. We are not teachers of a subject or a skill that pertains

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**Being a catechist  
is not a hat that we  
put on and take  
off as we please.**

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to one area of our lives. Instead, we invite others into a way of life that defines who we are at our very core. The simple fact is, we can't teach what (or who) we don't know. This means that we have to strive to know Jesus authentically, to internalize his message, and to follow the Catholic way of life that leads to him. We need to be the real deal.

**+ Missionary Zeal: Fuel and Matches** Along the journey, a backpacker may need to start a fire for cooking, keeping warm, or both. In order to do so, he or she needs matches to start the fire and a reliable source of fuel to keep it burning. Similarly, the vocation of the catechist calls us to be “on fire” for Christ. Our desire to share Christ with others is powerful and sometimes overwhelming. We can't help but share the gospel with others! In addition to this powerful flame, we also need staying power, a missionary zeal that is fueled by an infinitely reliable source. This fuel is the Holy Spirit.

**+ Devotion to Mary and the Saints: Flashlight and Batteries** At times, it may grow so dark along the path or at the campsite that a backpacker needs to generate a little light with a reliable flashlight and fresh batteries. Catechists recognize that the spiritual path can sometimes grow murky, too. Luckily, we have reliable sources of light—Mary and the saints—who brighten the path to Jesus and make it visible so that we do not stumble or lose our way. Mary was the first teacher of Jesus and the first disciple. She is a “living catechism” and a “model for catechists.” The spirituality of all the baptized is enriched by devotion to Mary, but, as catechists, our ministry is especially enriched by devotion to the Blessed Mother and to all the saints who show us the way to the true Light of the World, Jesus Christ.

**Anxious Parishioner:** Father, people keep telling me to calm down. Can you recommend a retreat house where I can experience spiritual peace?

**Pastor:** Sure, but once YOU'RE there, I doubt that it will be peaceful any longer!



## **“Yes! My Calling!”**

My fellow eighth-grade catechist, John, had been teaching for over ten years, starting when his daughters entered the program in first grade. Now that his youngest daughter was being confirmed, I asked John if he was coming back next year. He said, “I thought I was going to retire when the last of my girls was confirmed. But now, I realize that I want to come back and keep teaching. I think I’ve come to recognize that this is my . . . my . . .” “Calling?” I asked. “Yes! My calling!” he responded with excitement. John had not fully realized before now that what he was doing was a vocation. —Joe

In each chapter of *The Catechist’s Backpack*, we’ll delve more deeply into one of these items for the journey, reflect on it, and apply it to our own lives and our own vocation as catechists. These six characteristics encapsulate what all catechists have or seek to have in our relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Just as a backpacker needs essential resources, a healthy spiritual life also requires essential resources. Because it’s true that you can’t give what you don’t have, catechists need these spiritual resources if we hope to share them with others and prepare them for the journey.

## **An Unquenchable Thirst for Living Water**

Many of us would not describe ourselves as deeply spiritual. In fact, we often feel embarrassed that our spiritual life is not as strong as we’d like it to be. If you feel as though you hunger for God and desire to know him better, consider yourself blessed! This is the foundation of a healthy spiritual life—not a sense of completeness or perfection, but an unquenchable thirst for Living Water. Among Jesus’ last words on the cross were “I am thirsty” (John 9:28). Jesus’ cry for living water was not just a cry for physical relief from the dehydration he was experiencing.

**“What you are is God’s gift to you, what you become is your gift to God.”**

—HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

It was also a cry to quench the thirst of our desires and our longings—ultimately, a cry for our salvation.

This thirst for Living Water is a thirst for God's very life, a longing for God that only God can satisfy. To thirst for God is natural and healthy—much healthier than taking God for granted or pretending not to thirst at all. To call out to God for help is not to show weak-

ness. It is to acknowledge our relationship with God and our dependence on him. Even expressing anger with God is healthy because we only become angry with something we are invested in and care deeply about. The six characteristics of the catechist's spirituality are six ways we can deepen and broaden our investment in God and satisfy our thirst for him.

This book will help nurture your vocation as a catechist and nourish your spiritual life. You can use this book in a variety of ways. You may want to use it for personal reflection, or you might join or form a group at your parish and meet for weekly discussion and faith sharing. You might also pass the book along to a friend, especially one whom you feel would make a good catechist. However you use it, our hope is that this book will assist you in paying attention to the movements of God in your life and in cultivating your relationship with the Living God—which in turn will help you walk the journey with enthusiasm and authenticity and invite others to do the same.

**Let the one who believes  
in me drink. As the scripture  
has said, "Out of his heart will  
flow rivers of living water."**

—JOHN 7:38

## What Catechists Are Saying about Their Spiritual Lives

“My spiritual life right now can best be described by comparing it to the disciples waiting in the upper room for the Holy Spirit to come. I'm learning to rely on the Holy Spirit to take care of things that make me nervous! And the Holy Spirit is teaching me to trust. My favorite quote is by St. Catherine of Siena: “Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.”

—Jenn

My spiritual life right now can best be described by comparing it to the journey of St Paul. He worked so hard to try and complete the divine plan of evangelization; he is an inspiration to me. I have to mention all of the help I received from the patron saint of catechists, St. John Bosco, for the past nine years; he has taught me patience and persistence. I feel I have been blessed to have had the chance to touch the spiritual lives of over 100 of God's children.

—Tony

Presently my faith journey can be compared to Lent. There is desert wandering and dryness of spirit. The first demands a compass and the second needs to have thirst quenched.

—Susan

My spiritual life right now can best be described by comparing it to the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John, who meets Jesus at the well. Jesus reveals himself to her at the well, and every year he reveals himself to me. After my first class, I feel like the Samaritan woman after her talk with Jesus: I want to go out and tell everyone that I have met the Savior!

—Patty

I am currently a catechist for a girl I have been with since she started the program at age three. . . . We will be entering the eighth grade this fall. She has cerebral palsy and does not communicate . . . except through her beautiful eyes. My experience these past years has been different than most. . . . I see Jesus in her every time we are together. . . . My spirituality can best be described by my Confirmation name, Marie. . . . I love Our Lady and want to do everything our Lord asks of me.

—Karen

I have been a catechist for more than fifty years. My spiritual growth is somewhere between nascent and getting ready for the end. I am addicted to teaching and see my mentor as Paul, my patron. My prayer life is centered in the Liturgy of the Hours.

—Al

I would describe my spiritual life as a catechist as being in a dormant winter phase right now. In adult faith formation I tend so much to the spiritual life of other adults, especially during Lent and Advent, that I often forget to minister to myself. But I know that winter is followed by spring and that the seeds that are germinating in the winter of my heart will bear fruit with rest, prayer, and the grace of God. I am strengthened by the time I take to pray the rosary daily in my car on the way to work.

—Penny

It is only in the last few years that I have gotten comfortable with my own spiritual life and how it is expressed. In past years, I would have described myself as a spiritual seeker and found myself praying for my personality to be more of a steady and peaceful one rather than the strong and energetic one that I was given. I had an image in my head of a deeply spiritual person as a person who is calm, steady, serious, and soft-spoken. Definitely not me! I even knew someone who emulated the characteristics perfectly and so found myself praying to God to be just like this person! I realized one day, though, that God had given me a natural energy and strength of character that came from him. I could be a prayerful and spiritual person in my own way by thanking God for the gifts that he had given me, putting them to work for his purposes, and asking for God to increase the gifts that I had been given. ”

—Shaun

# Chapter 1

## Radical Reliance on God: An Abundant Supply of Water



Catechists should allow themselves to be drawn into the circle of the Father, who communicates the word; of the Son, the incarnate Word, who speaks only the words He hears from the Father; and of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the mind to help it understand God's words and opens the heart to receive them with love and put them into practice.

—Guide for Catechists, no. 7

### An Abundant Supply of Drinking Water

It's no secret that water is necessary for survival. No resource is more important for the well-being of a backpacker than an abundant water supply. In order to avoid dehydration, a backpacker needs to drink anywhere from two to eight liters, depending on the terrain and the temperature. And, although natural waters in streams and rivers along the journey might look pure and refreshing, they may contain harmful contaminants. These contaminants are not always obvious to us, so it is even more important that our drinking water come from a source which is pure and life-giving.

In order to survive and thrive on the catechist's journey, we rely on a pure source of Living Water: the very life of God that courses through our being and sustains us at all times. We may find ourselves tempted by other sources of "sustenance" that look appealing;

**Everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters.**

—ISAIAH 55:1



however, like stream water, these may contain “contaminants” that cause more harm than good. Catechists recognize that our hearts yearn for the pure goodness of God “as a deer longs for flowing streams” (Psalm 42:1). To be a catechist is to be rooted in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let’s take a closer look at what it means to live with a radical reliance on God.

## Trust Me

Two of the most frightening words in the English language are *trust me*. When someone uses these words, we are reminded of our own doubts and vulnerability. We know we are being asked to set aside our sense of self-direction and self-determination in order to let another guide us. In an instant, all our memories of broken trust seem to surface out of nowhere, begging the question, “Will this time be different?” To move forward, we must have faith in the person asking for our trust. We must place our well-being, our very heart, in that person’s hands.

In the catechist’s journey and in the journey of all the baptized, it is God who is saying, “Trust me.” To do this takes both courage and faith. The catechist’s faith is not merely an intellectual assent to a set of doctrines. It is the opening of our hearts and the giving of ourselves to another—in this case, to God.

## A Journey of about Eighteen Inches

It has been said that the greatest journey that we will make as Christians is a journey of about eighteen inches. This is the approximate distance from our head to our heart. The Christian life is about translating what we know about God into a heartfelt response to him and to the world around us.

## Trust Springs from the Soul

The Trinity and the shamrock were symbols that had great significance to the ancient Celtic people, among whom were the biblical Galatians. St. Patrick is said to have used the symbol of the shamrock to preach the gospel to the Irish by comparing its three leaves with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This probably derived from the Celtic belief that trust springs from the soul, belief wells up from the heart, and faith comes from the mind.

When we pray the Creed—"I believe in one God, the Father almighty. . . . in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God . . . in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life"—we are saying that we give our hearts to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Trust does not come easily for many people. Many of us have experienced the loss of trust in our relationships. We feel broken, angry, vulnerable, and sensitive. We may say to ourselves that we will never trust again. When you give your heart to someone and he or she breaks it, it's certainly not easy to trust again. We can see the effects of broken trust in the children, youth, and adults we teach. We see it, too, in the families we interact with, including our own.

Trust is the foundation of faith, for it leads to hope. As catechists, we are called to a deep trust in God—an openness to entering into relationship with the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This in turn gives us a great sense of hope. The Risen Christ, who came to us so intimately in the form of an innocent child, has given us the promise of eternal life.

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**Trust is the  
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for it leads to hope.**

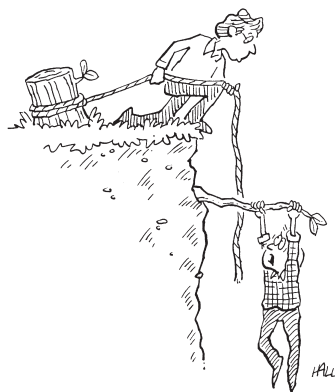
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Authentic trust in God touches us at the deepest core of our lives. It shapes who we are. It informs our values, convictions, decisions, and behaviors. As catechists, we become champions of the First Commandment; we are passionate about making God alone the center of our lives. This is what it means to live a God-centered life rather than an ego-centric one that places us at the center and God on the periphery. When God is our center, we model what that looks like for those we teach. We exert great energy to raise awareness of the many contaminated streams of water they may encounter: fame, power, pleasure, possessions, status, comfort, and so

### **Who Do You Trust Most?**

I was teaching a group of eighth graders a class on placing our trust in God. I asked the students whom they trusted most. They gave a variety of answers: my mom, my dad, my sister, my brother, my best friend. But one young man very calmly responded: "me." He didn't feel he could trust anyone but himself. We've probably all had moments when we've felt very much the same way. —Joe

on. We see it as our mission to invite them to experience how God alone quenches the thirst within us. We do this because we ourselves have come to know and believe that this is true. And yet we, too, need to be reminded of this over and over again. Temptation is often quite subtle and never far away. We need to renew our radical reliance on God and continually rediscover for ourselves that God can and should be trusted.



"Do you have any references?"

Pope Francis has said that "the man or woman who has faith relies on God: entrusts himself or herself to Him! Trusting in God is what leads us to hope. Just as the confession of faith leads us to the worship and praise of God, so trust in God leads us to an attitude of hope. There are many Christians with a hope too watered down, not strong: a faint hope. Why? Because they do not have the strength and the courage to trust in the Lord."

As catechists, we are called to be mindful of our radical reliance on God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How open am I to the love of the Father? How do I seek communion with Christ and experience his comforting presence? How do I allow myself to be molded by the Holy Spirit and transformed into a disciple of Christ? How am I growing as a courageous preacher of the Word, a champion of the First Commandment? Is my life marked by openness, joy, and hope? To nurture these qualities, we need to pray for faith—for trust—so that we can enter more deeply into the life-giving waters of the Trinity and live in relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

To believe is to enter into relationship with another and to place our trust in that person. It is to have faith in what we cannot see. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe," Scripture tells us (John 20:29). At times, trust also requires that we risk our

**"Love God, serve God;  
everything is in that."**

—ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

## **I Know You Will Always Come Back**

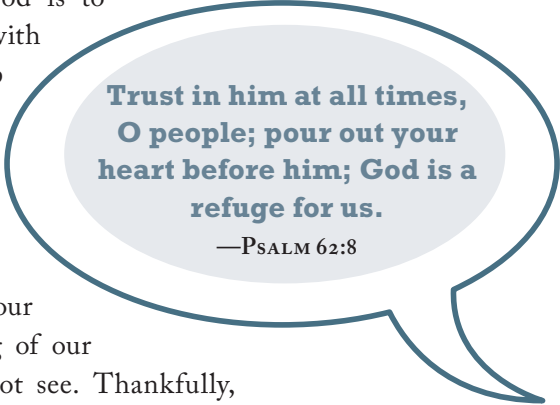
My son Ian, like most five-year-olds, is afraid of the dark. Usually his father or I have to lie down with him until he falls asleep. Before we go to sleep, one of us always checks on him and tucks his blankets around him. One night, when I returned to tuck Ian in, he opened his eyes and said, “It’s okay, Momma, if you go away or sleep in your own bed because I know you always come back when I’m sleeping. That makes it easier for me to sleep, you know.” And with that, he closed his eyes and fell fast asleep.

—Julianne

comfort, our reputation, and even our better judgment. Such trust is not easy! As catechists, we are convinced that our lives need to be centered in God. We probably have tried at various times to drink from other streams and, like St. Augustine, have come to believe that “our hearts are restless, Lord, until they find their rest in You.” Like any other human being, however, we struggle with this. We need continuous reminders about where and in whom to place our trust. To keep focus, we practice radical reliance on God.

## **A Relationship of Self-Giving Love**

To be radically reliant on God is to be open to a relationship with the Trinity—a relationship of self-giving love. All relationships involve trust, and to trust is risky. Perhaps the greatest risk of our lives is the risk of embracing our baptism—the everyday giving of our hearts to God, the entrusting of our lives to God, whom we cannot see. Thankfully, Scripture reminds us that God has proven worthy of that trust. This is what we teach our students—that God is trustworthy and gives us many reasons for hope.



**Trust in him at all times,  
O people; pour out your  
heart before him; God is a  
refuge for us.**

—PSALM 62:8

## Waving to Jesus

When my daughter was three years old, she could be a bit of a challenge at Mass. Coming forward to receive Holy Communion, for example, was always interesting. She would accompany me and wave and smile at people and whisper little greetings to her friends along the way. One Sunday, as I was kneeling in prayer after communion, she asked me if Mass was almost over. I replied that very soon we would say good-bye to Jesus and go home. Very quietly she went out into the middle of the aisle, knelt down for a few moments, and then began to wave discreetly at the altar. After I managed to bring her back to the pew, I asked her whom she was saying good-bye to. "Jesus," she said. "I was making sure to say good-bye to him before we went home." It gladdened me to know that in my daughter's heart, Jesus is as real to her as the people she sees before her. Oh, that we would all approach Jesus with the same childlike simplicity and trust!

—Julianne

## Catechesis: An Encounter with the Living Person of Jesus Christ

For many of those we teach, especially children, religious education is just one of many activities that make up a busy week. In their minds, faith formation gets lumped in with soccer, cheerleading, dance class, piano lessons, and football—and it will stay that way unless we invite our young people to meet a living person, Jesus Christ. Meeting and embracing Jesus is what transforms our efforts from teaching a subject to encountering a person. Through our own radical reliance on God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—we cultivate a spirituality that is alive and vibrant, enabling us to invite others to enter more deeply into this profound and life-changing relationship.

## Questions for Reflection

As catechists, we want to make time on a regular basis to deepen our reliance on God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We might pause daily or weekly to reflect on how God has shown through the events of our lives that he is worthy of our trust. Doing so will give us the conviction we need to teach others that placing their trust in God will not be in vain—and indeed, will bear fruit.

### Here are a few questions you might use for reflection.

- Whom do you trust most in this world? Why? Who places trust in you?
- Identify a time when trust was broken in your life. How did (does) that affect you?
- Why do you personally believe that God can be trusted?
- How has your trust in God been validated or affirmed over the course of your life? This week? Today?
- If you are having difficulty trusting God, what may be causing that?
- In what situations do you find it most difficult to trust God? Easiest?
- What can you do to deepen your radical reliance on God?
- Who do you know who exhibits a radical reliance on God? What is it about this person that you would like to emulate?
- How does your reliance on God affect you in your role as a catechist?
- How do you recognize when you are spiritually thirsty? In what ways do you satisfy your thirst for the Living Waters of God?
- How can you help those you teach to be more reliant on God?
- Where do you feel the stirrings of hope in your heart as a catechist? How do you share that hope with those you teach?
- What would you let go of in order to feel really hopeful and trusting right now?

Margaret was a catechist seeking to deepen her knowledge of God, so she began attending a parish where the pastor was known for his profound theological knowledge. After the first homily, however, she found herself bored by the length and confused by the depth of his homilies. As she was leaving the church, the pastor cornered her and asked her what she thought of his homily. Not wishing to offend, she said, "Well, Father, it reminded me of the peace and love of God." She hoped to leave it at that, but the pastor pressed further. "Really?" he asked. "Why is that?" Margaret replied, "If you must know, Father, it reminded me of the peace of God because it passed all understanding and the love of God because it endured forever!"



## For Further Reflection

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day.”

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

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## Spiritual Exercises

The following spiritual exercises are designed to deepen your radical reliance on God and to ensure that Living Waters are an essential element in your catechist's backpack. Consider sharing the fruits of your exercises with a friend or fellow catechist.

- › Make time at the beginning of each day to give your heart to God. You can use your own words, or you might pray the *Suscipe* of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding  
and my entire will,  
all I have and call my own.  
You have given all to me.  
To You, Lord, I return it.  
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.  
Give me only your love and your grace,  
that is enough for me.*

- › Radical reliance on God opens our hearts and minds to the possibilities around us. This, in turn, leads us to live in hope. Over the next several days, jot down in a journal or on an index card at least ten things that you are hoping for. Do so by completing this sentence:  
“I am hoping for/that . . .” Keep this list nearby so that you can glance at it frequently. Revise it occasionally. Before you begin to write your list, pray Psalm 62:1-8:

*For God alone my soul waits in silence;  
from him comes my salvation.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall never be shaken.  
How long will you assail a person,  
will you batter your victim, all of you,  
as you would a leaning wall, a tottering fence?*

*Their only plan is to bring down a person of prominence.*

*They take pleasure in falsehood;  
they bless with their mouths,  
but inwardly they curse.*

*For God alone my soul waits in silence,  
for my hope is from him.*

*He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.*

*On God rests my deliverance and my honor;  
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.*

*Trust in him at all times, O people;  
pour out your heart before him,  
God is a refuge for us.*

- Radical reliance on God is manifested in openness to others. In the days to come, make a specific plan to perform an out-of-the-ordinary act of hospitality that opens you up to another person or group of people. Perhaps you can identify someone around you in need of a special act of kindness. This act can be done at home, at work, or in your community. Spend a few moments afterward reflecting on your experience. What were you feeling before, during, and after your act of hospitality? Did anything surprise you? What was the hardest part of this act? What was the easiest? End your reflection by praying the Act of Love.

*O Lord God, I love you above all things  
and I love my neighbor for your sake  
because you are the highest, infinite and perfect good,  
worthy of all my love.*

*In this love I intend to live and die. Amen.*

- Radical reliance on God is fundamentally an attitude that informs our behaviors, choices, and way of life. It is tested, refined, and strengthened as we move forward on our journey. Take a moment to sit quietly and ponder this prayer in your heart. Notice where you feel called to pause and what feelings surface within you. For a few moments dwell in those feelings, and then conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving for God's faithfulness.
- Radical reliance on God involves a *metanoia*—a sincere conversion of heart and mind. As we turn toward God, we often turn away from something else. Take time to reflect on this idea. As you drink from



God's abundant well of love, mercy, and hope, remember also to identify patterns of sin that you have turned away from or wish to turn away from. Identify those "spiritual contaminants" that may have polluted your own well of love, mercy, and hope, and ask for forgiveness and the ability to reconcile those with God. If you have not been to the sacrament of reconciliation in some time, consider going again to talk about the issues that you have identified.

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### What Catechists Are Saying about Radical Reliance on God

“Little ones teach us about trust. Four-to-six-year-olds, generally, are not jaded or cynical with this life yet. They are so “full” of everything—life, wonderment, imagination, and most definitely trust. As adults, we tend to turn our backs on those people who disappoint us and break our trust. But that isn't so with little ones. They throw themselves right back at us and look for reasons to continue trusting us. We have so much to learn from them, don't we?

—Ali

I think we need to share our stories, with all the ups and downs, so that our young people can see real examples of how we've trusted God through everything in our lives. I think it's important for young people to see that unfortunate things do happen, but if we are people of faith, and trust in God, he will see us through the “bumps in the road.”

—Nancy

I feel that I have evolved into a rather trusting person, and believe me, that is not always popular in the business world! I used to wake up in the night worrying about work, for example, but now I generally have become so trusting of God that I will just tell myself that Jesus will hold onto my work and life worries until morning and I go back to sleep.

—Greg

Trusting God is an ongoing journey for me. I try to practice what I call God-sightings every day: times when God is present in the everyday. This practice has helped me to trust God and share with others about his love and faithfulness to us. To be near God is good!

—Stephanie

I do have an openness to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and this is deepened every day by prayer and the work the Holy Spirit does for others through me. When I prepare before class, I open myself completely to let the Holy Spirit work through me.

—Katherine

Through the years, I have developed such a strong trust in God and his perfect love because I have personally seen evidence of it in my own life—in the circumstances of bringing my wife into my life, in the blessings he bestows on us on a daily basis, in how he has always found ways to get us through difficult times, and so on. The toughest thing I had to learn to do was to “Let go and let God,” as in, “Let God show you the way.” And that is a continual lifelong process of learning.

—Henry

I agree that “trust” is the key word in growing closer to our Lord and in understanding God’s ways over ours. Every time, I’ve basically said, “I don’t know how, Lord, but I know you can. . . .” He has revealed answers to my prayers in ways I would never expect. I have seen God answer so many prayers, proving that when we place our worries, concerns, and needs in his hands, we are not forsaken.

—Nancy

I heard someone say once that “If God brings you to it, then he will lead you through it.” This has been a constantly unfolding revelation in my life. Because of this, I have a great sense of hope about God’s plan for my life, even when I am not sure where I am going. I believe that the presence of God is with me in the smallest undertakings of my daily life and this provides comfort and strength even when I am afraid or feel alone.”

—Claire

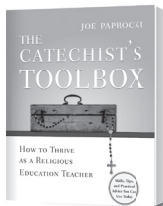
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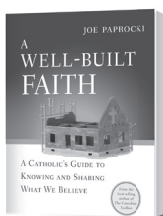
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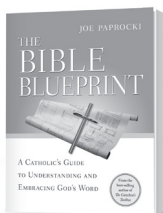
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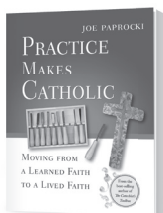
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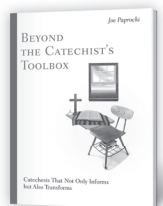
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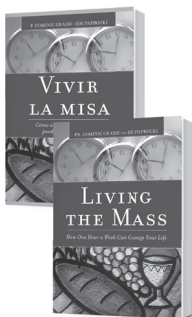
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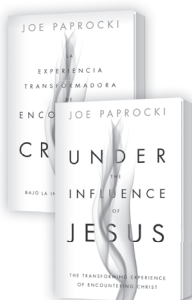


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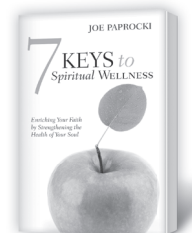


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