

## Seven Secrets of Successful Catechists

"It doesn't take a full-time teacher or a child psychologist to become an effective catechist — only a heart that is committed to serving God through this ministry and a mind that is open to trying some new ideas."

– Dr. Joseph D. White

I. What is a catechist? Someone who brings others closer to Christ by teaching them, based on the teachings of the Church (Story of Salvation).

II. What is the role of a catechist? To teach children, through word and deed, about the life of Jesus, the teachings of God and the prophets, and the story of salvation.

### III. The Secrets

A. Dedicate your work to God.

1. God's work, not ours

2. He is the leader and He will guide us and give us strength to do the job

3. how to dedicate work to God

a. pray before each class

b. pray as you plan

c. pray for the children, that they will be open to what we teach and that they will understand what is taught

1. pray for them by name

2. add special intentions for specific children: those who are maybe behaviour problems, those who have

problems at home, those who have difficulty understanding, etc.

B. Learn about the characteristics of the age group you teach.

1. learning styles, what they are capable of, how they interact with each other, activities which work with that age, etc.

2. Kindergarten

a. ego-centric ~ everything is about them

b. focus on God's creation and self-discovery

c. need to put themselves in relation to family, parish, Church

d. have lots of imagination ~ use that in activities and

discussions

e. what works

1. Bible stories, songs, plays with visuals

2. interactive activities

3. keep activities within a short time span; one half-hour

activity will not work

3. school-age children, grades 1 – 5 (ages 6 - 11)

a. have more problem-solving and reasoning abilities

b. much more social – group activities work well, especially in

upper grades

c. can understand moral points better – commandments/rules

are good

d. what works

1. games and puzzles

2. craft projects to reinforce the concepts

3. more abstract concepts presented at this age: Holy

Trinity, Penance, Eucharist, mystery

4. use visuals (St. Patrick)

5. act out or practice rites (confession, communion, Mass)
6. use concrete words the children will understand
7. relate things to their lives

#### 4. teenagers

- a. able to understand other points of view
- b. able to discuss hypothetical situations
- c. what works
  1. need a facilitator rather than a lecturer, gain their trust
  2. group discussions
  3. personal reflection – listen and they may amaze you

with what they say

4. how it applies to their daily lives and themselves

personally

#### C. Pay attention to your own faith formation.

1. we are called to a continual conversion to Christ
2. we are sharing our faith, not just telling it ~ we must live it
3. through prayer, reading Scripture, reading the CCC
4. we learn more everyday in everything we do (at our job, when we study/go to school)
5. we see/understand things differently at different ages (i.e., confession, math, the Mass)
6. if we have questions about something, we can research it, ask a priest, pray on it
7. it's okay to say, "I don't know, but I'll find out" – humility

#### D. Build a community.

1. what is a community? sharing and having certain attitudes and interests in common; a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common

## 2. communal faith

- a. communal religion – read Acts 2:43–47
- b. we form the Body of Christ
- c. "communion" – we receive the Body of Christ as one people
- d. catholic = universal
- e. "look not on our sins but on the faith of Your Church"

## 3. involve parents

- a. the family is the first catechesis the children encounter –  
parents are the primary educators
  - b. the parish is the second model the children see
  - c. we help form the first experiences children encounter with  
their faith
  - d. with the parents, we educate the students in their faith
  - e. how?
    - 1. communicate with your parents
      - a. meet them at the door before and after class
      - b. introduce yourself - through an email or a letter, or  
at the door
      - c. have an introductory meeting – present goals,  
requirements, expectations
    - 2. emails of events or special topics
    - 3. let them join the class if they wish
    - 4. activities they can help with or watch
- ## 4. communities among the children
- a. during snack or art project – informal interaction
  - b. group activities
  - c. group prayer – let them lead
  - d. circle time with younger ones

e. open discussions

E. Accommodate differences in learning styles to make lessons fun, interesting, and memorable.

1. how do you learn best?

a. visually?

b. hands-on?

c. orally?

2. make it multi-sensory

a. read stories with visuals

b. sing songs – do you play an instrument? maybe a parent does? or a student in the class?

c. acting

1. short plays

2. Bible story and they figure it out

d. arts/crafts

e. play games – as teams or individuals

1. game show

2. bingo

3. "Who am I?"

f. use the whiteboard for brainstorming ideas

g. powerpoint

h. videos

i. variety is the name of the game

3. be sure the activities are something you like to do - no fun for them if not fun for you

F. Take a positive approach to classroom discipline.

1. each have our own style and tolerance level ~ some can handle different behaviours

2. each class has its own "personality"
3. be proactive
  - a. discuss expectations first day
  - b. set class rules – keep it to a minimum
  - c. be positive – don't say "don't"; rather than, "don't talk to the person beside you", say, "I need everyone's attention here on me"
  - d. give reminders often
  - e. make sure your activities are appropriate for the age group (not too hard or too easy; time factor)
  - f. be aware of limitations of students (attention span, reading levels, etc.)
  - g. positive reinforcement – highlight the good rather than the bad
4. be consistent
5. have steps of consequence
6. challenging children
  - a. move to front
  - b. be near them (stand by them as you talk)
  - c. keep away from distractions (toys, friends, window, etc.)
  - d. empathy – talk alone after class, talk to the parents about possible problems, listen to them

G. Remember the importance of this work.

1. why do we do it? To bring the students closer to Christ by promoting the Faith, teaching them how to pray, giving them a moral education, and teaching about the Sacraments and Mass

2. is a calling - a vocation

- a. never stop learning yourself
  - b. always pray for help and guidance
3. does not end when we leave the classroom!