



Beginning the Catechetical Year: 1st - 5th Grades *Systematic Catechesis*

NOTE to Catechists:

During your first gatherings of the year with your learners, your main goal is not merely to inform them of the routines and expectations of their time at weekly faith formation sessions, but more importantly to discern their current understanding of age-appropriate faith concepts AND to create an environment for faith sharing and learning.

Focusing on activities that share our Catholic Identity clearly communicates to these students in public schools that faith formation sessions are quite different. Before even beginning The Bible Lesson, select from the following list of ideas in order to reach these three goals:

- 1. Get acquainted with each other**
- 2. Build a Faith Community**
- 3. Pre-assess whether or not your learners can “use” the Bible (class 2)**

Build a Faith Community

† Catechist Witness Testimony :

Learners of all ages are curious about their catechists/teachers. First, take time to introduce yourself as a believer and disciple of Christ. Share a few details about your family and your faith journey. Explain why you are a volunteer catechist. Why did you choose this parish ministry over all the rest (and share other ministries in which you are involved). Connect your role as a catechist to your way of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and encouraging others to know and love him and use him as your model as to how to live a holy life.

† “Blessed Particulars”/ Gift Bag of Faith

Gift bag of Faith – 3-4 items of faith placed in and pulled out of a “gift” bag that represent the catechist’s faith life and journey (e.g. a Bible, a rosary, a picture of a family member celebrating a sacrament); remind all that FAITH is a gift from God!





† Learners with Peers :

- Ask your learners to brainstorm 1-2 items that they can share with the class next week, by either bringing in the items and/or just telling about them. **(Be sure you begin next week's class with this activity after the opening prayer! Connect....connect....connect prior learning to the present! While most learners will forget to bring an item, be sure to pass around an empty gift bag and have each describe what they would have brought and why the item is important to their Catholic life.)**
- Ask other catechists in your parish to share ideas and activities that they have used in the past to promote bonding among your learners. Also, be sure to check your parish's religious textbook for additional ideas.

† Sacred Prayer Space/Table:

- Since prayer tables are not found in public schools, take time to consider what your room's prayer table has on it and how you call attention to it for your learners.
- Usual items include a cloth of the liturgical season's color, a crucifix or cross, a Bible or Book of Gospels, a candle and something representing Creation (e.g. a plant or flowers).
- Make it aesthetically appealing to all. To emphasize that all lessons have a Christological focus, try adding pictures of Jesus during different times in his life (e.g. some or all of the mysteries of the Rosary). If you are implementing the Essential Questions throughout the year, *build* your prayer table as the catechetical year progresses by asking learners what might need to be added from week to week based on the topics/themes discussed.

Pre-assess what your learners already know about the Catholic faith?

† Take time for “inquiry”:

Take time to *pose* open-ended questions and to *listen* to learners' responses. Pre-assessment is necessary to inform your planning for systematic catechesis for this year with this particular group of learners, regardless of what the scope & sequence states. Below are a few examples of such questions; use your judgment as to which ones will assist *you* in forming/building a faith community of *your* learners:

- Who is God to you?
- What does “faith” mean? What's one way you practice your Catholic faith?
- When and where have you seen God's presence in your life?
- Who is Jesus? Who is the Holy Spirit? How would you describe/explain each to someone who may not believe in God?
- Gather several visuals: a cross, a rosary, a picture of creation, a manger scene, a dove, a priest, the pope, a communion wafer, a chalice, the Paschal Candle...Show age-appropriate ones and ask:

What does this mean to you?

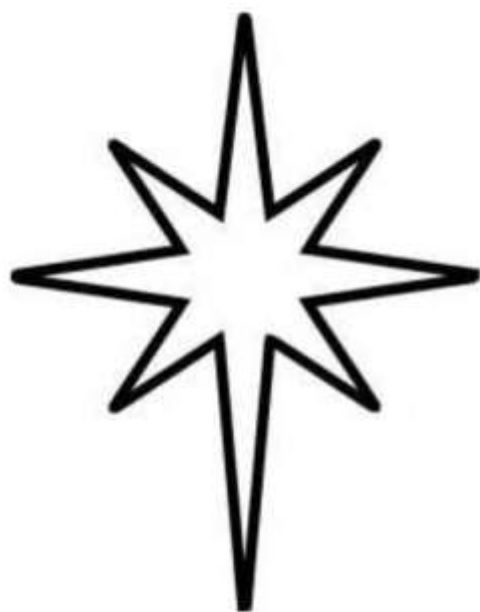
To all Catholics around the world?





For Older Learners (4th-5th):

- † Who in your life do you know and think of as being a good Catholic?
What makes you think so?
Be specific and cite their words, actions/deeds that give you that idea. Share & discuss.
(Use flyer your light must shine)



Extension Idea: by Tracey Chipley, 8th grade catechist, St. Edward)

- Read Matthew 5:16 – *Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.*
- Distribute this visual (Star of Bethlehem) to each learner; ask them to write the name of the person they consider being a good disciple of Christ.
- Have learners share this person's good deeds.
- Place each star on the Prayer Table OR create a poster with the title: *The world is a brighter place because of these disciples.*

Lets Talk... Why are you (students) here?

- † So why am I here?
- † Why should I attend religious education classes?
- † What's in it for me? (Read aloud *Dear Pope Francis*, pp. 38-39. Discuss: what makes sense to you from this letter by Pope Francis...and explain why? [Your parents were moved by the Holy Spirit to bring you here; catechists were moved by the Holy Spirit to share the faith with you.]
- † What is "Church"?
- † Why do Catholics worship in community at Mass?
- † What's in a Name? (given, baptismal) – modeled first by catechist
 - Ask learners to move to the 4 corners of the room – based on month of birth [corner #1 – Jan/Feb/March; corner #2 - April/May/June; corner #3 – July/August/Sept; corner #4 – Oct/Nov/Dec. [OR two corners if class size is small; OR concentric circles if class size is large]
 - Share your given name and why you were given that name.
 - Share your baptismal name and why you were given that name.

Conclude by sharing and explaining Isaiah 43:1 – *But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, Jacob, and formed you, Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.*

(Designed and/or Compiled by Dr. Sharon Skeans, August 2017)




† “M & M Prayers of Thanksgiving” –

Put learners in groups of 4-6. Pass around a cup with M&M’s in it and ask each to draw out one. Using the color of their M&M, share something for which they are thankful. [Note: do NOT use peanut M&Ms as some learners have peanut allergies.]

“M & M” Prayers of Thanksgiving

Thank you, God...

- (Yellow) - for something I have received
- (Green) - for my family or a family member
- (Blue) – for a special person
- (Red) - for someone at school
- (Orange) - for something I need (i.e. food, shelter, clothing)
- (Brown) - for gifting me with the special talent of _____.



† **Common Prayers** – Sign of the Cross; Hail Mary; Glory Be...(Just say these as a group and note who does and does not know them. They will be explicitly taught in Unit 1, but not today!)

† **Introducing the Concept of Missionary Discipleship:**

Discuss with your learners that the focus for the entire year is learning about Jesus Christ and how to be his disciple. For younger learners, use the phrase “follower of Jesus” rather than “disciple of Jesus.” Check your textbook’s glossary for age-appropriate definitions.

Pre-assess if your learners know how to use a Bible

➤ **Bible Lesson:** For all grade levels, this 30-minute lesson on how to use the Bible has the Essential Question: *Why and how do Catholics read the Bible?* Cardinal has asked that all catechesis be “infused with Scripture.” Each lesson contains at least one Scriptural passage that is broken-open to analyze and understand.

❖ **What’s in a Name?** (given, baptismal) – modeled first by catechist

○ Ask learners to move to the 4 corners of the room – based on month of birth [corner #1 – Jan/Feb/March; corner #2 - April/May/June; corner #3 – July/August/Sept; corner #4 – Oct/Nov/Dec. [OR two corners if class size is small; OR concentric circles if class size is large]

○ Share your given name and why you were given that name.

○ Share your baptismal name and why you were given that name.

○ Conclude by sharing and explaining Isaiah 43:1 – *But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, Jacob, and formed you, Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.*