

Disciples Tend To . . .

Serving as a catechetical leader is part of your overall response to Jesus' invitation to discipleship. A disciple of Jesus lives under his influence. As a catechetical leader—as someone who lives under the influence of Jesus—you are called to embody the following characteristics. Take a moment to jot a thought or two about how each characteristic is being manifested in your life and ministry. (Drawn from *Under the Influence of Jesus*, Joe Paprocki, DMin.)

Disciples tend to . . .

- be in touch with their deepest desires _____

- have an awareness of their own desirability in God's eyes _____

- experience God's nearness _____

- desire to be actively involved in God's work _____

- experience intimacy with God _____

- understand that grace is a gift from God and not something we earn _____

- seek out others with whom to share the journey _____

- find God in all things _____

- profoundly revere each person as he or she is _____

- have a deep sense of gratitude _____

- live as a person for others _____

- rely on Jesus to help them navigate through the gray areas of life _____

What the Church Says about Its Own Mission

As a disciple of Jesus Christ to serve as a catechetical leader, your task is to participate more fully in God's mission of drawing all people to himself. Take some time to reflect on the following quotes from church documents about the mission of the church. Then answer the question that follows.

Christ, whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, (176) has through His apostles, made their successors, the bishops, partakers of His consecration and His mission. (62*) They have legitimately handed on to different individuals in the Church various degrees of participation in this ministry.—*Lumen Gentium*, 28

The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.—*Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (Ad Gentes)*

Our own time, with humanity on the move and in continual search, demands a resurgence of the Church's missionary activity. The horizons and possibilities for mission are growing ever wider, and we Christians are called to an apostolic courage based upon trust in the Spirit. He is the principal agent of mission!—St. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 30

Jesus' life and preaching decisively marked the history of the Christian community, which has viewed its mission in terms of Christ's command to be a permanent instrument of his mercy and forgiveness.—Pope Francis, *Misericordia et Misera*, 7

In our day Jesus' command to "go and make disciples" echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary "going forth." Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel.—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20

All ministry finds its place within the communion of the Church and serves the mission of Christ in the Spirit. Thus, communion and mission provide the foundation for understanding and carrying out lay ecclesial ministry.—*Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*

What is my understanding of the Church's mission and my role in it?

Recalling Your Calling

Serving as a catechetical leader is not merely a job but a vocation to which you have been called—and vocations involve discernment. You will be better able to help others discern their vocations if you make it a practice to reflect on your own

- **Thoughts**
- **Memories**
- **Feelings**
- **Hopes and desires**
- **Dreams**
- **Nature**
- **Experiences**
- **Encounters with others**
- **Encounters with beauty**

God speaks to us in many ways. Which of those listed above helped you discover your vocation as a catechetical leader?

Which of the ways God speaks to us listed above might you pay more attention to?

Assessing My Spiritual Wellness

Take a moment to assess your spiritual wellness by reflecting on each of the six characteristics of the spirituality of the catechetical minister. Write a few thoughts about what you can do to improve or sustain your spiritual wellness in each area.

Spiritual Characteristics of the Catechetical Minister	Rate from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest (this is my weakness) and 5 being the highest (this is my strength).	What can I do to improve or sustain my spiritual wellness in this area?
Openness to God I recognize that God alone sustains me, and I turn to God to ask for his strength and grace in all that I do.	1 2 3 4 5	
Openness to the Church I recognize that I am called and sent by the church, and I seek its wisdom and guidance.	1 2 3 4 5	
Openness to the World I recognize God's grace and presence in the world, and I confidently strive to bring hope to the world.	1 2 3 4 5	
Authenticity of Life I have a living relationship with the Lord, and I sincerely believe and practice what I preach to others.	1 2 3 4 5	
Missionary Zeal I have a high level of energy and enthusiasm for my ministry, and I feel inspired to go forth and serve others.	1 2 3 4 5	
Devotion to Mary and the Saints I look to Mary and the saints for guidance and inspiration in my ministry.	1 2 3 4 5	

Tips for Spiritual Wellness

As a catechetical leader, you are called to be a spiritual leader. Your task is to seek “the more” of the Kingdom of God and to call others to do the same. It is crucial, then, that you pay attention to your own spiritual wellness so that you can help others do the same.

Tips for Spiritual Wellness	What am I doing or can I be doing to pay closer attention to my spiritual wellness?
• Pray the Daily Examen.	
• Engage in <i>lectio divina</i> .	
• Pray the Rosary.	
• Go on retreat.	
• See a spiritual director.	
• Regularly receive the Eucharist.	
• Celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation.	
• Read about lives of the saints.	
• Pray the Liturgy of the Hours.	
• Journal.	
• Spend time in nature.	
• Participate in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.	

FAQs About Lay Ecclesial Ministry

As a member of the Body of Christ and as a lay ecclesial minister, you are called to work together—to collaborate—with other key members of the Church to further the Kingdom of God. Lay ecclesial ministry is new in some ways and yet has ancient roots in our Church. The key characteristics of this ministry are that you have been authorized by Church leadership, you have assumed a specific leadership role in ministry, you collaborate generously with peers and superiors, and you are committed to ongoing formation. Here are some frequently asked questions and answers about lay ecclesial ministry.

1. Where can I find an articulation of the U.S. bishops' vision for lay ecclesial ministry?

In 2005, the U.S. bishops issued a document titled *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*. This document articulates the bishops' vision for lay ecclesial ministry.

2. What is lay ecclesial ministry? Who are lay ecclesial ministers?

Lay ecclesial ministers are non-ordained ministers (laity) who, by virtue of their baptism, are called and prepared to serve in a specific public ministry in collaboration with and under the authorization and supervision of the hierarchy.

3. What are some examples of lay ecclesial ministers?

Some common examples of lay ecclesial ministers in parish life are pastoral associates, parish catechetical leaders, youth ministers, school principals, and directors of liturgy or pastoral music. Lay ecclesial ministers also serve in hospitals, in health-care settings, in prisons, and as campus ministers.

4. How many lay ecclesial ministers presently serve in the United States?

According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, nearly 40,000 people are working as lay ecclesial ministers today in the United States. Nearly 80 percent are women; the median age is 55; only 15 percent are under 40; 89 percent consider their ministry a vocation, not just a job; about half work 40 hours on average per week; 46 percent have a graduate or professional degree; 88 percent are white, 9 percent are Hispanic, less than 2 percent are African American, less than 2 percent are Asian, and less than one percent are Native American; and more than 4 in 10 serve in catechetical leadership.

5. When there are more priests, will lay ecclesial ministry be necessary?

Lay ecclesial ministry is not considered a stopgap measure. The U.S. bishops affirm that there will always be a need for cultivating, developing, and sustaining vocations to lay ecclesial ministry.

6. What makes someone qualified to serve as a lay ecclesial minister?

Those called to serve in lay ecclesial ministry must participate in thorough and intense preparation that focuses on four areas of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. It is preferred that lay ecclesial ministers acquire a master's degree, or at least a bachelor's degree, in an appropriate field of study.

How to Write a Role Description for a Catechetical Leader

A good place to start when shaping a role description for a parish catechetical leader is the *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers* created by the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers and approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Commission on Certification and Accreditation. A good role description or ministry profile that sets one up for success should include the following (drawn from *Employing Parish Catechetical Leaders: A Practical Handbook*, from the Wisconsin Directors of Religious Education Federation — WDREF):

- The title of your specific role (coordinator, director, etc.)
- Qualities and qualifications expected in your role (knowledge, abilities, skills)
- Identification as a salaried or nonsalaried position, full-time or part-time, and, if it applies, the minimum number of hours per week required to accomplish the assigned tasks
- Specified duties and scope of ministerial responsibilities, which may include some or all of the following, as well as others:
 - Adult/young adult
 - Youth/high school
 - Elementary
 - Preschool/kindergarten
 - Special needs
 - Parochial school
 - Vacation bible school
 - RCIA (children and adults)
 - Family/intergenerational catechesis
 - Sacramental preparation (Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, Matrimony)
- Description of the evaluation process
- Details relating to salary and benefits (including health, dental, and life/disability insurance, vacation, holidays, education allowance, retreat time and financial assistance, travel reimbursement, sick/personal days, bereavement days, retirement, ongoing formation, unemployment compensation, family leave, portability of benefits, etc.)
- Identification of the superior to whom you report
- Term of position (10 or 12 months)
- Personnel you are responsible for supervising
- Administrative responsibilities
- Participation in parish, regional, diocesan, and national organizations

Tips for Maintaining Balance

As a catechetical leader, you need to exercise specific spiritual muscles in order to remain stable in your vocation and avoid the pitfalls that can occur in ministry. Let's take a look at some of the realities of pastoral ministry that hold within them the potential for sapping your energy, leading to burnout. Likewise, let's identify some things you can and should do to minimize the possibility of these factors overwhelming you and, if needed, to recover from their harmful effects.

Pitfalls, Obstacles, and Challenges	Suggested Actions	What am I doing or can I be doing to combat these?
There's No End in Sight! In the catechetical ministry, it often feels as if there is no end in sight, simply because there <i>is</i> no end!	Be sure to calendar pauses and breaks from your ministry so that you can replenish your energy and resume your journey.	
Am I Making a Difference? Because so much of your work is intangible, you can find yourself wondering if it is making a difference.	Engage in other tasks or hobbies that produce tangible results.	
This Feels like a Merry-Go-Round Because ministry—especially the catechetical ministry—is cyclical and repetitive, you can quickly grow weary of the routine.	Consider finding ways to change things up every year without necessarily rocking the boat. Try to keep things fresh by adding some new twists and turns to your program.	
Expectations Are High People will constantly be coming to you with expectations and needs. And the fact is, as a minister, you most likely see yourself as a helper.	Build in time for solitude so that you are not always surrounded by people who have expectations of you.	
Tired of the Same Ol' Faces In ministry, as in many other professions, you can find yourself seeing the same faces day in and day out.	Cultivate relationships outside your ministry.	
Who's Gonna Take Care of Me? People in service professions spend great amounts of time and energy catering to the needs of others.	Be sure that outside your ministerial world, you have nurturing relationships in which your needs can be tended.	
Can I Say What I Really Feel? In many ways, the pastoral minister is called to put on a persona.	Know your own limits. Know your personality type.	
Experiencing Failure From time to time in pastoral ministry, we can feel like out-and-out failures.	Remember to separate yourself from your achievements and your failures and to learn from each of them. But do celebrate your successes!	

Where Do I Find Support?

Catechetical leaders rely on a network of relationships to sustain them. These relationships not only support you but also help you stay grounded and honest. Take a moment to identify the people you turn to, to “keep it real.” Jot down a few names and thoughts in each of the categories below.

Family

Friends

Peers/colleagues

Mentor(s)

Faith community

Local, regional, and national professional organizations

Three Behaviors of Servant Leaders

At the core of Jesus' leadership style is service. In his book *Servant Leadership Models for Your Parish*, Dan Ebener calls Jesus' style of leadership "servant leadership" as opposed to what he refers to as "pedestal leadership." He describes servant leadership as an approach that focuses primarily on the needs and interests of others and that positions the leader in service of a mission that is greater than himself or herself. Take a moment to reflect on how and to what extent you practice the following three behaviors of servant leaders.

Behaviors of Servant Leaders	What I Am Doing or Can Do to Strengthen This Behavior
Recognizing —acknowledging, affirming, and calling forth the gifts, talents, and efforts of your catechists	
Serving —accepting the problems and needs of your catechists as if they were your own	
Empowering —developing or enhancing the capacity of your catechists to act on behalf of themselves and the faith community	