Notes to a Newbie Catechist



**On Surviving — and Thriving — in Catechetical Ministry**

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You’ve been asked to volunteer as a catechist. Maybe someone tapped you on the shoulder as you enjoyed a cup of coffee after Mass, or perhaps you read something in the Sunday bulletin and offered your services. Possibly your child is enrolled in religious education and parents have been asked to lend a hand. You’ve likely agreed to serve out of a true sense of calling or a willingness to help. Whatever your story may be, here are some things to keep in mind to help you grow in your role as a catechist.

**It all Begins with a Relationship with Jesus**

As a catechist, you will encounter a wide variety of receptiveness in your hearers. Some learners are like sponges, excitedly listening for anything you can share with them about Jesus, his Church, and the truths of our Faith. Others are less open, skeptical, or perhaps even resistant to your efforts. In time, it is only natural for your early excitement to wane unless your enthusiasm flows from a reservoir within you. This reservoir must be kept full through your ongoing relationship with Jesus — fed through four life-giving streams: sacramental life, personal prayer, community, and spiritual direction.

Let’s dive into each of these four streams that will keep your spiritual reservoir brimming with life.

**Sacramental Life.** An effective, joyful catechist is fed on the Bread of Life every Sunday, and more often if possible. The Church teaches that the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of our faith. This teaching invites us to reflect on the reality that everything begins and ends with Jesus. As you receive the Lord in Holy Communion, you are transformed from within.

Jesus invites you to share what you have received with others — allowing the life of Christ and the joy of his presence to flow to everyone you encounter. Regular reception of the Eucharist ensures that when you share with the children entrusted to you, you are sharing from the life of grace you have received from Jesus himself.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an additional gift of grace available to all the baptized. Yet it is neglected, or perhaps even avoided — by many. Although confession is only required once a year, it has long been recommended to be received more regularly for those sincerely trying to grow in holiness. Serving as a catechist may bring you face-to-face with your own experience with this sacrament of mercy. Perhaps you have struggled with this sacrament, or even been away from it for years. There is no better time to return than now, as you begin to teach others. Regularly receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation will keep sin from becoming an obstacle to the life of grace necessary to thrive in catechetical ministry.

**Personal Prayer.** In my years as a catechetical leader, I’ve found that the life-giving stream of personal prayer is a discipline with which most catechists struggle. Many have even admitted that, although they were being asked to teach prayer and its importance to the students, they had little or no experience with it in their own lives.

If you are beginning this catechetical year without time dedicated to nurturing your friendship with God in prayer each day, there is no better time to make this positive change! Pick a time of day that will work consistently. For most it will be first thing in the morning, but for some people, later in the day works better. Find a sacred space — it can be as simple as a chair in your bedroom with a crucifix on the wall in front of you. Then decide how much time you can commit. Begin with as little as 10 minutes per day, and then stick to whatever you decide. During that time, just be with the Lord, like you would with a good friend.

Open your heart to Jesus and tell him about your joys, your sorrows, and the deepest desires of your heart. Open the Scriptures and read from one of the Gospels, or choose the readings of the day from the lectionary. Let God’s Word encounter you right where you are.

As you grow in intimacy with Jesus, your lessons will come alive as you teach others about him — not simply as a man who lived in history, but as friend, Lord, and Savior.

Community. Gathering with others involved in ministry is of immense value as you seek to serve as a catechist. In community with other catechists, your strengths and gifts are affirmed, your struggles shared, and your joys increased. Even if your parish program does not include regularly scheduled meetings for catechists to receive formation and support, nothing prevents catechists from informally gathering to share with one another.

In addition to sharing the graces and strains inherent in catechetical ministry, the support and friendship of other catechists can also provide a network of accountability — a friendly check-in to be sure that your spiritual resolutions are being kept and a helpful nudge to get back on track when needed.

**Spiritual Direction.** Finally, spiritual direction is a wonderful stream of grace for anyone desiring to grow in intimacy with Christ and seeking effective, joyful discipleship. Although it can take various forms, spiritual direction is simply the accompanying of one Christian with another on the walk of life. We always must remember that the true spiritual director is none other than the Holy Spirit. In the absence of a formal spiritual direction relationship, perhaps find a mature spiritual friend or mentor with whom to share the movements of the Holy Spirit in your life and to whom you might be accountable. Sharing with a spiritual director should always lead the one being directed back to Jesus and a growing understanding of his invitation to love and serve.

Catechetical ministry is one of the most demanding — yet potentially rewarding — ministries in a parish. The responsibilities are daunting, and obstacles to effectiveness loom large. Without being fed by the streams of the sacraments, personal prayer, community, and spiritual direction, your reservoir may run dry. You may wonder how you ever got yourself roped into this ministry in the first place. Yet by taking the time to be sure that your own spiritual reservoir stays full, you can become a source of graces and blessings to all those you serve. What’s more, you will encounter the Lord ministering to you in the process.

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