

THE CATECHIST'S FORMATION WORKBOOK

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Sample

The
CATECHIST'S
FORMATION
WORKBOOK



10 SESSIONS ON DEVELOPING
AND THRIVING AS A CATECHIST

This workbook is based on and adapted from *Into the Fields* ©2006 by Twenty-Third Publications.
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Introduction

So, you are starting a new year of catechesis! Many experiences await you to help both you and your learners grow as disciples of Christ. Whether you are a brand-new catechist or teacher or have already taught for a few years, we hope you will learn from and enjoy the material in *The Catechist's Formation Workbook*.

The Catechist's Formation Workbook is rooted in Scripture, liturgy, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and is based on both the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) and the *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC).

Each of the ten sessions in this volume begins with prayerful reflection. These brief reflections invite you to begin your time of study by considering your own experience of God's love. A reflection question and space for you to record your thoughts lead to a time of prayer.

Tools for Teaching is the formal teaching section, providing the connecting link between spiritual growth, content of the faith, and instructional strategies needed to do excellent catechesis.

Step one sets the tone with an introductory story or exercise.

Step two helps you reflect on the significance of the topic for catechesis.

The three sections of material that follow guide you in implementing the objectives, using theory, practical commentary, and examples, plus strategies for different age levels. Also included are questions for personal use and group discussion to help you integrate what you have learned.

You may be invited to attend a group session in which you will discuss the material and share with other catechists. These gatherings will help you grow both spiritually and professionally. Instructions are provided throughout on how to make the most of the various elements, whether you are studying alone or with a group. Read the appropriate section in *Tools for Teaching* and reflect on the questions as you study or before each large group session. Keep this volume close by while you are teaching, as well as while you are studying. It is not meant to sit on your shelf!

Remember: you are a very important figure for your learners. You are a living witness of the faith you seek to share with them. Your example speaks volumes. You never know when, through you, the Spirit will touch the hearts of your learners. God's grace works in mysterious ways. Even when you think a lesson may seem to be a complete failure, your kindness, your enthusi-

asm, your willingness to speak the truth, any or all of these, may make an impression on one or more of those you teach.

So we hope you will make the most of this book and all it contains. It has been prepared with much care, research, and prayer. May your basic catechetical skills and attitudes continue to grow by leaps and bounds!

Preparing yourself *and* your learning space



The goal of this session is to prayerfully and effectively prepare for your learning session.

YOUR OBJECTIVES ARE:

to continue your spiritual formation through prayerful reflection on the love of God

to learn ways to prepare carefully and prayerfully before each session

to learn how to promote an atmosphere in which the learners feel welcome

to learn how to organize the teaching space

SKILL: Prepare a welcoming, organized space for learners

BEGINNING THIS SESSION

Before you begin to develop your skill in preparing a learning space, take a few moments for reflection and prayer.

Seeing ourselves and others with God's eyes

God is in love with us. And so, like a good lover, God courts us and woos us with signs and symbols of love. When we don't get it, God tries again and again, all the while hoping that we will finally take notice. And God won't give up until we finally get the message. When we finally allow God to love us, the power of that love is transforming.

Many of us struggle all our lives to believe that we are lovable and have unique value.

Sometimes we've convinced ourselves in the depth of our soul that we are not lovable, that our life doesn't really make a difference. If you struggle with such feelings, it is important to ask God to open your heart to love.

God sees us just as we are and yet loves us beyond words. God's love does not depend on our holiness or perfection. Even beyond that, there is nothing we can do to earn God's love. It is simply a freely given, gracious gift.

What if we could see ourselves and others as God sees us? Are we not the apple of his eye? What possibly could keep God from loving us? The truly amazing thing is that there is nothing at all, not even sin, that can keep God from loving us.

Take a moment to reflect

Ask yourself: How has the hand of God been present in my life?

The time of prayer

As you move from reflection to study, take a moment to pray for yourself, your learners, and your time together in catechesis.

*Dear God, Lord of my life, I sit in awe
before the gaze of your love.
It is sometimes difficult to let
you love me in this way.
I'm not used to its power and warmth.
But I want to let your love transform me so
that I can become a better disciple,
a better teacher and bearer of your Word.
Set me ablaze with the fire of that love.*

From personal reflection to sharing faith

As a catechist, you have the opportunity to share the transforming love of God with your learners. In this session, you will develop skill in preparing your learning space in order to create an environment in which your learners may open their minds and hearts to this incredible love of God for us.

TOOLS FOR TEACHING

Catechists are to identify and create “suitable conditions necessary for the Christian message to be sought and accepted.” **NDC 54B.8**

Setting the tone

“Be faithful, then, in following the example of Jesus; be strong and firm in faith, and love the community as you love one another.

Remain united in the truth and be as gentle as the Lord in dealing with one another, looking down on no one. If you can do good, do not hesitate, for charity frees us from death.”¹

The importance of this session

- How do you make your learning space a sacred space? Welcoming? Effective?
- Prepare yourself with prayer and become familiar with the content of the material you intend to share.
- Remember an experience of welcome in the parish community that you enjoyed. Consider why it was a welcoming experience, and incorporate that into your own efforts at welcoming your learners.
- Prepare your teaching space in a way that emphasizes your theme for that lesson.

Step one: *prepare yourself*

Love is the motivating force for your own preparation. In a sense you have made a covenant as God did with his prophets and his people: to proclaim God’s word. In order to teach your learners about God, you will want to emulate God’s teaching style. You can do this by reflecting on the word of God, by reflecting on the experience of gathering in the Sunday assembly, by praying for your

¹ *Share the Light*, St. Polycarp, Letter to the Philippians.

learners, and by knowing the content of the material well.

STRATEGIES FOR PREPARING YOURSELF

Refer to your catechist's or teacher's manual for specific suggestions for your lesson. Then read through these strategies.

- Preparing yourself allows you to be clear about your focus—that is, the learners—to pace yourself, and to visualize yourself teaching. After all, your witness and enthusiasm are important factors in teaching the lesson.
- Be prepared for the unexpected. Prepare alternate activities in case those you planned don't work out; have a "Plan B" in case a guest speaker doesn't show up, or your media equipment doesn't function properly, or for other unexpected circumstances.
- In the Sunday assembly, you gather with your faith community to celebrate God's love and your faith response. The welcome and unity of the assembly can be a model for welcoming your learners.

- Pray for yourself and your learners. You may want to keep a list of their names on hand so you can think of and pray for their needs as individuals, not just as a group.

Step two: *prepare your learning space*

Having a well-prepared learning space can pique the interest of the learners and invite them to participate in the sessions. Preparing or adding something related to the lesson to the meeting space or classroom will appeal to the imagination of your learners. Refer to your textbook manual for ideas. Have a focus object (something related to the lesson that will capture their attention), name tags they can create or that are already prepared, or some age-appropriate activity that will engage early arrivals. Keep in mind their age level—whether children, youth, high school students, or adults—in preparing your teaching space, and incorporate in some way a visible element of the liturgy.

Keep in mind the interests and needs of your learners in preparing the teaching space.

Younger children like objects they can touch, smell, and so forth. Older learners,

including adults, are stimulated by puzzles and objects that challenge them to think.

Step three: make learners feel welcome

Hospitality and welcome go far beyond a simple greeting. In addition to the detail we give to preparing the learning space and creating a good learning environment, we also want to engage learners by name and to help them participate in creating a warm learning environment for their fellow learners. In the first gatherings, name tags are very important, not only to help people feel a sense of belonging but also to allow them the freedom of engaging with others whom they may not know too well. As the entire group begins to address each other by name, the importance of each learner is implicitly affirmed, as well as their presence and their contribution to the group as a body. Appropriate sharing of our life experiences fosters a culture of mutual trust and affirmation, which is especially vital to the adult learning experience.

**STRATEGIES FOR CREATING
A WELCOMING ATMOSPHERE**

■ Every learner, no matter what age, has

different abilities and his or her own way of learning. Be alert to the need to affirm and honor cultural and individual diversity, and encourage the learners in expressions of their uniqueness. Point out that each of us brings different gifts to the church, and so we add to God's family. We can all learn from one another. We each bring unique gifts to the learning process through our different styles and ways of learning.

■ Create a learner-centered environment in which learners understand that their needs have priority over the planned session. Let them know that you give your time freely because you care about them and their growth as followers of Jesus. Show empathy. Try to see the world through their eyes. No matter what age you teach, talk to your learners at their level. Show respect for their thoughts and recognize their insights. Help them express themselves if necessary. Never "put down" a learner or ridicule him or her.

■ Draw out the learners who tend to

Having a well-prepared learning space can pique the interest of the learners and invite them to participate in the sessions.



be silent, but also challenge those who express themselves more freely. Show respect to both introverts and extroverts. Expect the best from all the learners, whatever their age. Stretch their minds and hearts through activities, questions, liturgical experiences, outreach programs, and so on. Keep communication open between you and each learner.

- Above all, share your joy in accompanying them on their faith journey. Present loving images of God. Show through your own example what the learner's relationship with God can be, especially as a part of your parish family.

Step four: *make your teaching space a welcoming, sacred space*

Catechists often teach in many different surroundings: a church, a meeting hall, a classroom, a living room, a church basement. The physical setup of your teaching space is important for “planting the seed” of God's word, for hearing God's word, but any environment can become a welcoming

and sacred space if you keep the following elements in mind.

Through these activities, help your learners enter into the mystery of Jesus and celebrate his presence among us:

- Create a “prayer space” and let it be the central focus of your learning environment. The prayer space can be as simple as a corner with a few flowers and a Bible; a table covered with a cloth or a banner; a crucifix or other image according to the season, such as a Bible, a candle (be careful about fire codes), and so on. The prayer station will help make it clear that Jesus is the center of your lessons, of your whole program.
- Plan your seating arrangement. If at all possible, arrange the seats in a circle, semicircle, clusters, or some formation that allows you and the learners to interact more easily. (If you share the use of the room with another class, be sure to return the chairs to their proper places when you are done.) The seating arrangement also assists in managing behavior with younger learners and youth.

You can separate talkative learners, place those who are “attention seekers” farther in back, and place learners who need more assistance closer to you.

- Make the room more attractive and functional by using pillows, small rugs, and plants. Have an activity center where learners can do alternate activities if they finish the group work early or where learners can process the lesson on their own.
- If you are a catechist and share your teaching space with others, bring objects and materials with you that relate to the lesson. Keep the materials together in a box, bag, or something else that is easily portable. Teachers may already have areas to keep their materials organized and at hand.
- You may often be able to obtain resources from local merchants: for example, large boxes from appliance stores, rug samples from carpet stores, paint and wallpaper samples from paint stores, or brochures and maps from travel agencies.

- Visuals unrelated to your lesson are unnecessary and can prove to be very distracting for the learners. Use posters, pictures, decorations, and objects that relate to the goals of the lesson. Use the learners’ own artwork as much as possible.

- Involve your learners in arranging the learning space. Don’t conduct your lessons from a front desk or table. Use a small table, a lectern, or some other minor piece of furniture to hold your manual, your notes, and other materials.

- It is always important to have the learning space prepared before learners arrive. Be there early enough to have the necessary time to prepare, so you can be present to the learners as they arrive. Have your supplies organized and any equipment you are using ready and in working order.

Do your best with the resources you have, then teach with confidence, joy, and love!

Share your joy in accompanying them
on their faith journey.
Present loving images of God.



As you end this session

Use your imagination in preparing your teaching space for your next session. Watch TV shows for ideas, especially if you teach children or youth. Refer to your text and other resources such as books and magazines for teachers and catechists. Ask another catechist, teacher, or your catechetical leader for ideas.

The catechist must consider all the human factors of a particular age level in order to present the Gospel message in a vital and compelling way. **NDC 43**

Catechism connection

In preparing your learning space with care, you create an environment in which your learners may open their minds and hearts to God's loving plan. Read and reflect on articles 50–73 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to explore this in greater depth.

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