

Self-Care for **catechists**

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PRACTICES

TO ENHANCE YOUR
WELL-BEING

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A joyful heart is the health of the body, but a depressed spirit dries up the bones.

PROVERBS 17:22

The recent emphasis on “preventative medicine”—a proactive approach to patient care—affirms the need for adopting healthy habits in order to prevent disease and infirmity. This holistic sense applies not only to the body but also to the mind, heart, and soul. Taking care of our physical, emotional, intellectual, and emotional needs is vital to a practice of well-being.

Well-being is essential for those working in parish ministry. Even so, the demands on one’s time and energy can easily pull us away from safeguarding our health. It is difficult to carry the Good News to others with dried bones and an ill-tempered spirit. Healthy practices not only lower the potential for exhaustion and burnout but also restore the joyful heart that makes for authentic discipleship.

This booklet offers ideas tailored for those who work in catechetical ministry. Each topic includes a short reflection, prayer, and a soul-feeder—a concrete suggestion for putting the idea into practice. Let each one bring you a deeper sense of well-being so that you can minister with the best of what you have to share with others.



Rekindle Your Zeal for Being a Catechist

I remember the day I first discovered my calling as a catechist. Facing a restless group of third-graders, I knew I couldn't simply read the text of a Scripture passage to them. The lesson included the passage from John 8:3–11—the woman caught in the act of adultery. Without going into the particulars of her sin, I began to tell the story to the children and ramped up the drama by imitating the fervor of the crowd. After slowly lowering myself to the floor to imitate the action of Jesus, I became aware of how quiet the group had become. Looking up, I saw the children hanging over their desks with curiosity and wonder. That moment confirmed my zeal for catechesis.

Look back on your own experience: A class that went differently and much better than you planned. The sign of interest or understanding conveyed in a student's demeanor. The question that sparked an engaging class discussion. What drew you toward being a catechist? How have your gifts been well-used? Recalling our first calling to the ministry renews a sense of excitement, newness, and the delight that comes with being a catechist.

SOUL-FEEDER

Start a small journal to log your experiences as a catechist. Use it for reflection after each catechetical session, noting the ways you share the Good News with your students. Review your entries every month and note the ways in which you continue to develop your gifts and rekindle your love of being a catechist.

PRAYER

Enliven my heart and draw me more deeply into my role as catechist, O God. May I continue to seek and find the spark of joy that engages me in this important work.



Go Beyond the Guide

Catechist guides provide valuable information about planning and implementing lessons. Well-constructed guides also contain background material on church teaching and biblical scholarship, personal reflections, insights into learning styles and teaching methods, and enrichment activities. As such, they enable a catechist to carry out a well-grounded lesson.

Tools, however, don't replace the one using them. Thus, the importance of bringing your own style—or what the *General Directory on Catechesis* calls “savoir-faire”—to your catechetical efforts. Such style gives the catechist a way of “knowing how to transmit the message, so that it is an act of communication” (no. 238).

Consider how this works in your experience. As you become more seasoned as a catechist, how does your unique style show itself? It might be through music or art or the knack of explaining difficult concepts in understandable and interesting ways. Go beyond the guide to discover and use your own savoir-faire as a catechist. This not only keeps your students interested and engaged, but it also uncovers gifts you might not even know you have. The more you exercise your unique gifts, the more you will find ways to put them to use in carrying out your role as a catechist.

SOUL-FEEDER

Reflect upon a particular gift you bring to your ministry as a catechist. Recall a time when your unique style brought life and color to a catechetical lesson. Let this be a source of inspiration in planning your next lesson.

PRAYER

Creator God, provide the guidance I most need as a catechist. In doing so, help me to discover the best in myself that I can bring to my students and their families.



Savor the Word of God

My husband, Ron, loves quotes. He stores them all over the place—on notes stuck beside his computer, pasted on the mirror above his dresser, tucked into notebooks and calendars. They come from books, song lyrics, poems, and film characters. He often draws upon a quote in the middle of a conversation. The most oft-repeated of these tends to send our children into a bout of eye-rolling until they start to understand the depth behind the words.

Such an attraction to words might be considered the first step in the prayer of *lectio divina*—divine reading. Author and spiritual teacher James Finley describes this form of prayer as “sustained receptivity to a beauty not yet thought about.” We take in a line or passage from Scripture and, in faith, recognize the presence of God speaking to our hearts.

Such practice is well-advised for all spiritual seekers but is especially vital for catechists. Since Scripture forms the grounding for catechetical lessons, we are not likely to present it well unless it has first lodged in our hearts. Or as Psalm 119 so beautifully states: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path” (verse 105).

SOUL-FEEDER

Allow ample time to reflect upon and engage with the Scripture account in each of your lessons. Read passages before you start your lesson planning. Open yourself to the words and images. When the word takes root in your own heart, you are then ready to share it more fully with those you catechize.

PRAYER

Guide me in reading and reflecting upon your sacred word, O God. Let the beauty of Scripture settle into my heart and guide me as I share it with my students.