

INTRODUCTION

Diversity abounds in our world. One area where that is demonstratively true is in how we learn. We learn in multiple ways; usually each of us has one (or a couple) preferred ways of learning. All learners are created equally—and differently. No one has a better learning style than anyone else.

Paying attention to various learning styles is the Catholic thing to do. We learn about God in various ways: through creation, in people, in prayer, and through Scripture. Jesus used stories and illustrations, parables, questions, discussion, lecture, object lessons, and debates to communicate his message in a way that connected to his learners. The Church has continued this multisensory methodology: sacred art, music, drama, dance, our sacramental rites. Today, with increasing media and technology and the richness of all that surrounds us, we can continue to deepen our ways of learning.

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SOME THINGS FOR CATECHISTS TO REMEMBER

- *More than our preferential way.* Even though researchers point out that each of us probably has a favorite—a preferred—way of learning, that doesn't mean that is the only way we learn. Most of us learn in various ways; often, what we're learning dictates the best way to learn.
- *Overlapping of methods.* Some methods—because of their richness—are suited for various ways of learning. For example, journaling may appeal to those who learn with words, those who enjoy learning by themselves, and those who learn through experiencing. Role playing and drama occur in several of the learning styles because they appeal to many of the various ways we learn.
- *Learning in multiple ways.* One of the best ways to learn is to focus on more than one way. Most of us process information best when we encounter it in a variety of ways. Research shows that using various regions of the brain increases the capacity for interconnection. Therefore, as we include various approaches, learners will be engaged in a multitude of ways.
- *Learning by practicing and repeating.* Learners remember information better when they are given many opportunities to practice retrieving it from their memories and think about its meaning. Rather than just memorization or rote assignments, we can use various types of methods, multiple ways of learning, to help them delve deeper into the meaning (rather than just memorizing facts and details).

- *Providing choices.* Because learners have various abilities, interests, and preferred ways of learning, try suggesting options. A lesson on the Holy Spirit might entail choosing one option that will help learners reflect on and understand the gift of the Holy Spirit in their lives and the life of the Church, e.g., molding a clay symbol of the Holy Spirit, writing a prayer to the Holy Spirit, watching the daily news for examples of people who are listening to the Holy Spirit (and make a collage or newspaper about them), or finding one of the Church's prayers to the Holy Spirit and designing gestures for it.

The suggestions in the following pages—for ways of teaching, activities for learners, prayer, and service—are only a beginning. Hopefully, they will spark many more ideas to enrich your faith formation sessions as we surround our young people with an environment of vibrant learning, reflective prayer, and committed living as disciples of Jesus.

We Learn by Seeing

It is believed that about 65% of the population learns best by watching and seeing. They observe everything, including pictures and written directions. They prefer to use images and color to organize information and communicate; they enjoy making notes and using maps and diagrams. They learn best when people *show* them how to do something rather than just telling them.

They:

- prefer to read information in a book or on a whiteboard rather than listening to a lecture;
- enjoy doodling and drawing;
- tend to use sight words in their everyday terminology (For example, “Let’s take a look at this.”);
- easily remember details including colors and spatial arrangements;
- excel at memory games that require visual recall.

What did Jesus do? *Jesus used visuals to help people remember: “Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19).*

THINK ABOUT USING

- demonstrations;
- drawing, sketching, doodling, painting, sculpting;
- images, graphs, maps, flow charts, diagrams, pictures, charts, posters, collages, and puzzles;
- guided imagery and visualization;
- hands-on tasks such as arts, photography, video-making, painting, building blocks, puppets, and play dough and clay.

FIVE FAITH FORMATION IDEAS

- 1** Invite learners to create a picture of what they think _____ (peace, faith, the Holy Spirit, etc.) looks like.
- 2** Have learners make a wall hanging that incorporates symbols of the needs of your community and our world today. Use it during prayer times.
- 3** Create a newspaper to tell a specific gospel story: pictures, news, stories, editorials, interviews, letters to the editor, etc.
- 4** To summarize a Scripture passage or the main message of one of your session's themes, have learners design a t-shirt or bumper sticker.
- 5** As you tell a gospel story, invite each child/youth to draw or paint the scene they visualize in their mind.

FIVE PRAYER IDEAS

- 1 Invite learners to take photographs as they go through their day to illustrate a specific theme: peace, where I saw God, compassion is alive, etc.
- 2 *Visio Divina* is similar to *Lectio Divina*. *Visio* focuses on what we see: where is God in this place/situation? What is God telling me in this place/situation? Use icons, paintings, and/or photographs learners have taken or found on the internet.
- 3 Pray with color.
 - Praise God by matching something you are wearing; for example, blue: give thanks for sky, birds, the eyes of friends, etc.
 - Use a color for various prayers. For example, use purple while praying for animals, green for family members, blue for the Earth and the environment.
 - Choose a word or line from the day's Scripture reading. Print it and decorate it with colors that express your feelings.
- 4 Have the children/youth bring a photo or picture of those they would like to pray for (an actual photo or from a magazine/newspaper). During a quiet time of prayer, pass the pictures as each person prays with them. Prayer needs can be written and attached to the back of pictures.
- 5 Place a large map of your nation at the center of the room. Read 1 Timothy 2:1–4 and invite learners to get into small groups of three or four to pray for government leaders and those in authority. Ask them to quietly form new small groups to pray for the Church in the nation, and especially your parish.

We Learn by Hearing

Studies show that 20%–30% of people learn best by hearing. Some of the strengths of these learners include being:

- good at explaining ideas out loud;
- skilled at oral reports and presentations;
- unafraid to speak up;
- good at following verbal directions;
- an effective member of study groups;
- a gifted storyteller;
- and able to work through complex problems by talking out loud.

They:

- remember by talking about what they have heard;
- need to hear explanations of what they are learning and how to do things;
- may not find it so easy to work out what to do when things are written down; they like to have someone explain what to do;
- usually enjoy working in a group or having group discussions;
- enjoy music, remembering song lyrics and conversations;
- also mix a variety of senses into their learning (e.g., coloring a picture as they listen to the lesson).

What did Jesus do? *Jesus reminded us of the importance of hearing: “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).*

THINK ABOUT USING

- songs to remember things, composing songs to retain information;
- musical instruments and musical games;
- presentations, discussions, debates, and read-aloud activities;
- information in poems, acronyms, songs, rhymes, or melodies;
- role-playing, plays and skits, interviews, and storytelling;

FIVE FAITH FORMATION IDEAS

- 1** Learning from the life stories of others is one way of passing on the faith. Invite parishioners and community figures to your session so that your learners can hear their experiences of God and Catholic living.
- 2** Acronyms form a word from the first letters or groups of letters in a list or phrase; e.g., TAPS (Prayer of thanksgiving, adoration, petition, and sorrow). Invite your learners to think of other acronyms to remember some of the realities of our faith.
- 3** Those who learn by hearing are sensitive to the speech quality, tone, and timbre of the voice, intonation, etc. As you prepare for your session, have your family help you record the Scripture passage so your learners will hear different voices and expressions.
- 4** Provide opportunities for conversation. An effective way of learning is in small groups where children/youth have the opportunity to put their ideas into words and hear the ideas of other learners.

- 5 In preparation for a new theme, have your learners interview three adults. They might ask: What do you remember about the time you were confirmed? How do you like to pray? When was a time you had to make a difficult decision?

FIVE PRAYER IDEAS

- 1 Children love to pray by singing. Use some of the musical renditions of our memorized prayers: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, etc.
- 2 Having encouraged children/youth to listen for the Responsorial Psalm during Sunday liturgy, use the one-line sung response from the psalm for prayer in your session—and suggest it for family use, perhaps once a day.
- 3 Pray about sounds. Have learners listen to the sounds around them and marvel at the variety. Thank God for this symphony of sounds.
- 4 Choose a psalm and put it to music. It can be a simple chant, a melody they already know, or something they make up.
- 5 Pray a song. Select a favorite hymn.
 - Look up the lyrics and read through the words as a prayer.
 - Write out the verses that speak most profoundly to you as a prayer.
 - Sing along to the song, paying particular attention to the words. Sing the words as a prayer to God.