

A Template for an Evangelizing Catechetical Session

by Joe Paprocki, D.Min.



As a catechist, you are not a teacher of a subject but rather the facilitator of an evangelizing encounter with Jesus Christ.

In order to facilitate an encounter with Jesus Christ, your faith formation session must take place within a climate of prayer (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 85) that incorporates a language of mystery (sign, symbol, and ritual) that makes your session resemble Mass more than class. Within this

prayerful context, you will transmit the content of our faith that has been revealed by God through Jesus Christ, who entered into human history and said and did specific things that reveal how we find salvation through him. Following is a template for structuring a typical 75-minute catechetical session that creates a climate of prayer and delivers the content of our faith so that the experience is both evangelizing and catechetical.

1 of 4

Preliminaries (15 minutes)

Establish a climate of prayer and encounter Jesus in our midst.

- ◆ If possible, ahead of time, arrange the seating so that it looks and feels less like a classroom (e.g. circle, semi-circle).
- ◆ Greet participants at the door with a bowl of holy water (held by you, an aide, or one of the participants), and invite them to dip their fingers and bless themselves.
- ◆ Play liturgical music in the background as participants gather.
- ◆ Give participants a slip of paper, and invite them to write down one thing they are thankful for and one thing or person they would like to pray for. Have them fold the paper and place it in a basket.
- ◆ Once all have arrived, turn down the music and handle any needed introductions, attendance-taking, and business.
- ◆ Invite participants to prayerfully set up the prayer space.
 - Provide each participant with a sacred object, such as a prayer cloth in the color of the liturgical season, Bible stand, Bible, flameless pillar candle, basket of prayer intentions, crucifix, bowl of holy water, or an icon.
 - Have participants line up on one side of the room for a procession.
 - Have the participant with the cross lead the group as they slowly process around the room, while an appropriate song is played and/or sung.
 - Have the last participant ring a hand chime every five seconds.
 - As each participant approaches the prayer table, he or she sets down the object and stands at his or her seat.
- ◆ Lead an opening prayer.
 - Pause for 10–15 seconds of silence.
 - Pray the Sign of the Cross.
 - Begin with a ritual greeting such as, **“This is the day the Lord has made!”** *“Let us rejoice and be glad!”*
 - Invite participants to make the threefold Sign of the Cross with their thumb on the forehead, lips, and chest. Initiate this by saying, “Let us pray today that God’s Word will be...in our minds [forehead], on our lips [lips], and in our hearts [chest].”
 - Pass the flameless candle around, and invite each participant to share one thing he or she is thankful for.
 - Pass the candle once more as each participant shares a prayer intention.
 - End with a traditional prayer. Alternate the prayer each month.

Engage (15 minutes)

Enter through their door.

- ◆ Introduce the theme/topic/big idea of the lesson. Announce it clearly, and write it on the board or an easel.
- ◆ Do an engaging activity/icebreaker that enables you to “enter through their door”—drawing from their lived experience, current events, or popular culture—to grab their attention in a way that connects with the direction you intend to take with your lesson. Your *Finding God* or *Christ Our Life* catechist manual has ideas and suggestions for ways to introduce the lesson theme and engage the participants.
- ◆ Invite a minute of silence to prepare to hear God speak in the lesson. Follow the moment of silence with the session-starting prayer in *Finding God* or one of the prayers in the What Catholics Should Know section of *Christ Our Life*.

Explore (25 minutes)

Transmit the content of our faith and listen to what Jesus has to say.

- ◆ Invite a participant to come forward, bow before the Bible, and read a passage that sheds light on the session theme. (Scripture passages are referenced in the textbook.) End the Scripture reading with “The Word of the Lord./Thanks be to God,” or “The Gospel of the Lord./Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.” Have the reader return the Bible to its enthroned position on the table, bow before it, and return to his or her seat.
- ◆ Deliver the content of our faith by interacting with a textbook, viewing and discussing a video, or interacting with some other appropriate resource. Relate the content to the big idea of the lesson.
- ◆ If using a textbook, show a brief video or use some interactive media that reinforces or sheds light on the content being transmitted.
- ◆ Engage participants in a discussion or some other activity that further clarifies, fleshes out, or reinforces the content being transmitted and the big idea. Possible activities are found in your program’s blackline masters or art prints.
- ◆ End this segment by listening to a song (either liturgical or popular/contemporary) that flows from or reinforces the theme of the session and the big idea.

Reflect (10 minutes)

Facilitate an intimate encounter with Jesus Christ.

- ◆ Invite participants to come forward one at a time to take a small battery-operated tea light candle from the table and proceed to a chosen or assigned “sacred space.” This is the place in the room where they will remain during the guided reflection or experience of *lectio divina*. It may be on the floor but in a seated position—no laying down.
- ◆ Lead a guided reflection that flows from and connects with the theme/big idea of the lesson and invites participants to use their imaginations and their senses to go to a place where they will encounter Jesus and engage in discussion with him. Alternately, you might lead an experience of *lectio divina*.
- ◆ Allow a few moments of silence at the end of the guided reflection or *lectio divina*.

Respond (10 minutes)

“Be sure to leave through your door.” Take Jesus into the world.

- ◆ Use resources from the textbook or other resources to assess participants’ comprehension of the big idea and to identify ways to apply the lesson taught to everyday life.
- ◆ Give an assignment that invites/challenges the participants to put into practice what has been learned and to share with their families.
- ◆ Invite participants to share how they put last week’s lesson into practice.
- ◆ Lead a closing prayer.
 - Pause for 10–15 seconds of silence.
 - Pray the Sign of the Cross.
 - Lead participants in a traditional prayer, a decade of the Rosary, a sung refrain, or a Mass part (Confiteor; Gloria; Creed; Holy, Holy, Holy; or Lamb of God). *Finding God* users may choose to pray the prayer at the end of each session in the book.
 - Invite participants to share a Sign of Peace.
 - Pray the Sign of the Cross.
- ◆ Have participants bless themselves with holy water as they depart.
- ◆ Return the room to its usual arrangement.

Techniques for Building Community

Sentence Completions

One of the quickest and easiest ways to get a conversation started among strangers is to give them a list of half-finished sentences to complete and explain -- or to let the partners interview each other, turning the sentences into questions. The best sentences to use are ones that are completely non-threatening and yet give people a chance to share some interesting facts about themselves, such as sentences that begin with "My favorite" or "If." For example: My favorite time in the day is..., If I had a million dollars to spend for the benefit of humankind, I would....

Multiple-Choice Questionnaire

A series of sentences, each with a set of choices, allows people to get into deeper material without wasting a lot of time. Indicate your first and last choices for completing the sentences, then each person in the group explains his or her choices for the first sentence, and why. The *why* is more important than the answer because it allows a person to volunteer a little more about himself. For example:

My idea of a good time is:

- a. a quiet evening with a good book
- b. a stroll through the park with someone I like
- c. a shopping spree
- d. watching a pro football game
- e. a long walk in the country by myself
- f. a good bull session
- g. going out to eat with some friends

Reminiscing Choices

This is similar to the sentence completions, but you choose only *one* of the four experiences and go on to describe it. Include interesting anecdotes of significant lessons you learned from the experience. For example: The first time I tried to dance....

Four Questions

A series of questions develop a particular subject area. They range from the ridiculous to the sublime and can deal with areas such as friendships, games, heroes, expectations, etc. Each person in the group answers the first question and elaborates on it. Then each person answers the second question, etc., until you have gone around on all four questions. See how the following series develops the subject area of "warmth."

Where were you living between the ages of seven and twelve... and what were the winters like?

1. How was your home heated during that time?
2. What was the center of warmth in your life when you were a child? (This can be a place in the house, a time of year -- or a person.)
3. When did God become a "warm" person to you...and how did it happen?

Fantasy

Think and dream your perfect vacation. For example:

1. Where would you like to go?
2. What transportation would you like to use?
3. Who would you like to visit along the way?
4. What book would you like to re-read while you are gone?
5. What would you like to bring home with you?

Imaginative Questionnaire

Try describing your spiritual condition right now in one of the following ways:

- Choose a color and explain.
- Choose a weather condition and explain.
- Choose a number from one to ten.

Pop Quiz

To surface information in a hurry that can be used as the basis for a sharing experience, one of the best approaches is the Pop Quiz. It gives the person a chance to collect his or her thoughts for a few seconds before having to share. Here are possible models.

Fire Drill: Write down 10 items you would grab and take with you if your house caught on fire. In your imagination, run through every room and jot down the specific items that you would try to take. (Assume the children and pets are safe.) After 30 seconds, in groups of four, share the three most important items on your list and explain why. You could vary this by taking a trip into space or a camping trip.

Success Analysis: Write down two accomplishments for different age periods (e.g. 1-5, 6-10, 10-13, 14-17). For instance, when you were between 7 and 12 you may have won a dance contest or an athletic award. Then, in groups of four, share your accomplishments and explain how they reveal your changing values.

Family Fun Times: Quickly write down nine or ten things your family enjoys doing together, such as camping, playing ball, eating popcorn, square dancing, etc. Then, beside each activity, put the symbols that apply. For example: \$ -- if it requires more than \$10, T -- if it requires traveling more than 100 miles, O -- if it brings your family closer together, etc. Then put a circle around your three favorite activities.

Time Line/Turning Points

Assuming the line below is your lifetime, divide the line into the major periods of your life, such as childhood, adolescence, college, young adult, and adult. Think back over your life and try to pinpoint on this line the major "turning points." A turning point can be considered anything that has significantly influenced or altered your life, or shaped your present values. It can be a happy or painful experience, but it is one which is now viewed by you with great meaning. It may be the death of your mother when you were 12, a spiritual commitment you made while in high school, etc.

Time Line:

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Continuum

On the continuum lines, participants picture where they are between the two extremes. In groups of 4 each person shares his or her profile and allows others to agree/disagree with his or her estimate. For example: talker -- listener, thinker -- doer, leader -- follower, adventurer -- nester, giver -- receiver.

Self-Evaluation Chart

People can see how they have grown through a program, a course, or a retreat by placing a mark on the top of the line for the way they feel at the beginning and a mark on the bottom of line for the way they feel at the end. For example:

About myself, I'm feeling...
useless and worthless _____ valuable and important

About my group, I'm feeling...
I couldn't tell them anything _____ I could tell them anything

About God, I'm feeling...
very cold _____ very warm

About the Church, I'm feeling...
indifference _____ involvement

Make Your Name Tag

Instead of having prepared name tags, make your own. Tear a piece of colored construction paper into a shape symbolic of you: a heart, a butterfly, a... Write your first name on it, punch two holes in it and wear it on a string around your neck like a medallion. When groups are formed, explain your name tag to your group.

Magazine Collage

Leaf through a pictorial magazine or daily newspaper and tear out titles, pictures, words, slogans, want ads, that portray you in some way, such as: 1) the concerns in your life at the moment, 2) the important things in your world, 3) your hopes and dreams for the world, etc. Then paste your tear-outs together on a sheet of newsprint, add color, and design with magic markers.

Clay or Play-Doh

With a piece of clay or Play-Doh about the size of a golf ball make an object that symbolizes you in some way, such as a box, an animal, a free-form piece of sculpture. In your group, explain why you see yourself as you do.

Wire Sculpture

Using bailing wire (available from farm supply stores) or pipe cleaners make a sculpture that describes your spiritual life at the moment. When you are in your small group, share the meaning behind your sculpture.

Sculpturing

In Two's: one person is the modeling clay and one is Michelangelo. Sculpture feelings like fear, joy, tension, despair. In Four's: two people are the clay and two people are Michelangelo. Sculpture relational words like distrust, trust, confrontation, affirmation. In Eight's: four are clay; four are Michelangelo. Sculpture collective items like celebration. In Eight's: everyone can be clay and the sculptor. Sculpture concepts like Christian community, discipleship, etc.

Mystery Person

On a blank sheet of paper, answer several questions. Fold the slips of paper and place them in a bowl in the center of the group. One person takes out a slip, reads the clues aloud, and everyone tries to guess which group member matches the answers. Finally, the mystery person confesses and explains the last answer. Sample questions: a *color* that reveals your personality, an *animal* that portrays the way you see yourself, a *song* that illustrates your philosophy of life.

Roving Reporter

Group size may vary from 5-10. Each group is given a spoon. Tell the group that what may look like a mere spoon is actually a sophisticated microphone in disguise! The exercise works as follows:

1. People may speak only when they have the microphone in their hand.
2. The microphone will be passed around the group, each person handing it to the next, until the facilitator says "stop."
3. At that point a question will be asked, and each person will think of their response, but only the person with the microphone may speak. When that person has shared his or her response, he or she will hand the microphone to a person of his or her choosing, who will then share a response to the same question. This continues until the facilitator calls time after 2-4 people have shared.
4. The microphone is once again passed around the group until "stop" is called.

Repeat the process for several rounds, asking a different question each time. Before you ask the question in the third round, you may want to suggest that the microphone be given to someone who has not shared in any of the previous rounds.

Roll-of-the-Dice

Give each group a set of dice. On the wall post newsprint on which 12 questions have been written, each with a corresponding number. Each person will roll the dice and share their response to the corresponding question. Several rounds can be played. If a person rolls the same number more than once, he/she simply re-rolls for a new number. (This activity can also be done with one die and six questions.

Variations

- After sharing, each person can ask one other person to share a response to the same question.
- Each person is given two "Choice" tokens (i.e. small pieces of paper with the word "choice" on them, or pennies, or poker chips). If a person rolls the number for a question they do not wish to answer, they may play a "Choice" token and choose any other question to answer.

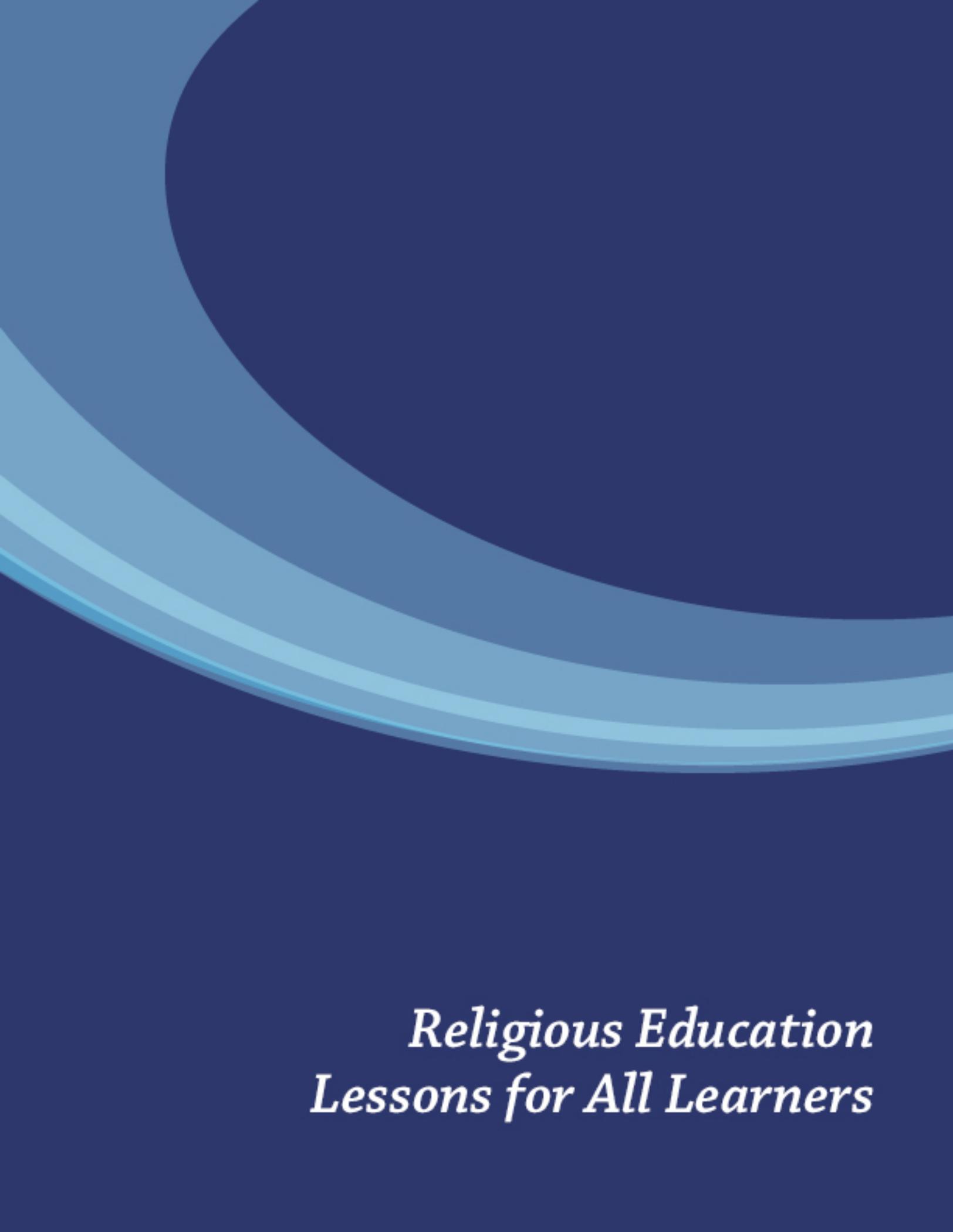
Lottery Draw

Assign each person in the group a “lottery” number consisting of three digits. The facilitator randomly draws a number from 0-9, and asks a question. Every person in the group who has that number appearing in any of the three digits of their lottery ticket shares their response with the group. When sharing is finished, the facilitator draws a different number. **Example:** The number drawn is 6. The lottery numbers of members of a group are: Person A: 236, Person B: 870, Person C: 662, Person D: 001, Person E: 547, Person F: 069. Then persons A, C, and F would share their response to the question.

Four Corners

Gather the group in the center of the room, and explain that a statement will be read with four choices for responses. Each person must choose one of the options as their response. They then go to the corner indicated for that response. When everyone has gathered in the appropriate corners, they introduce themselves to one other person who is standing in the same area. The facilitator then reads a question and the partners share their responses with one another. After a brief time for sharing, the group gathers back in the center of the room, and a different statement is read with four choices for responses. Several rounds can be facilitated with different questions each time. Examples of “choice” statements and sharing questions:

- Choice for dessert; ice cream - apple pie - cheese cake - fudge brownie.
- What would you do if you won the lottery?
- Choice for a free Saturday: hiking - movie - read a book - wander the mall.
- Who would you like to interview from history, and what one question would you ask (excluding Jesus)?
- Choice of season for year round (assume no school): spring - summer - fall - winter.
- With a free ten day trip for two, where would you go, who would you take?
- Choice of career: medicine - law - education - business.
- Your picture and “words to live by” will appear on the cover of TIME magazine, what would they say?

The background is a solid dark blue color. On the left side, there are several overlapping, curved bands of lighter blue shades that sweep across the page from the top left towards the bottom right, creating a sense of movement and depth.

*Religious Education
Lessons for All Learners*

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LESSONS FOR ALL LEARNERS

Children learn in all different ways, just like adults do. Think of yourself as a learner. You may prefer learning along with a group, engaging with others as you ask questions and digest new information. Or, you might prefer to study independently, synthesizing new information alone in a quiet space. Children have these types of preferences, too. Read these tips to your modify lessons and design effective instruction for all types of learners in your religious education classroom!

INTEGRATE BODY BREAKS

Many children need a break between activities to reenergize for the next lesson. Research shows that even twenty seconds of high-energy movement can

lead to greater attention and higher engagement for students. With this in consideration, design lessons with natural breaks. For example, if students have been working at their seats for a session and are coming to the meeting area for a new lesson, integrate a movement break. You might want to try:

- A “shake-down” where students shake their hands in the air and count backwards from twenty
- 5 jumping jacks, running in place, or high jumps
- 2 minutes of holding a yoga pose
- 1 minute of free dance
- Sing a class song or a prayer that integrates hand and body movements with the lines

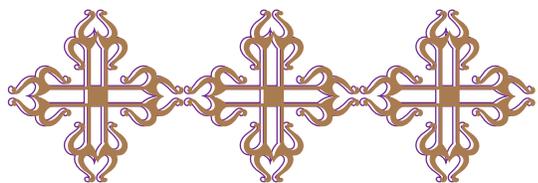
You might be surprised with how just a short body break can increase student attention and engagement, and might even increase yours as the catechist, too!



PROVIDE LINGUISTIC SUPPORT

Consider the needs of your students’ English language skills. In today’s world, catechists hope to prepare students not only with the content

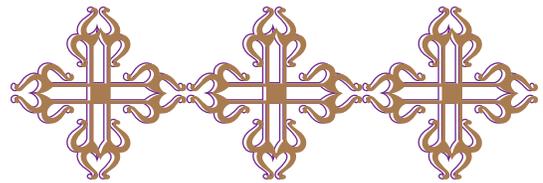
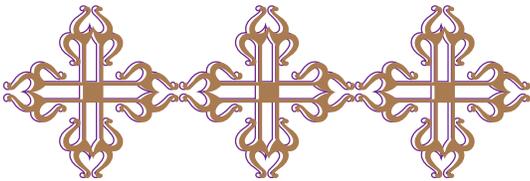
knowledge that they need to know their faith, but also with the language to share their faith clearly, efficiently, and with sophistication. Keeping this in mind, provide models for language use throughout your classroom. Model clear and concise communication. Use visuals to support the language use and faith vocabulary in your classroom. Create a word wall of important words, which might also include phrases and sentence stems. Students can rely on these words and phrases to clearly structure their ideas. You will find that the more they use your supports, the less they will rely upon them. Additionally, this will support your English language learners and lead them to success in the religious classroom as well.



CONSIDER LEARNING STYLES

Is the majority of student work in your classroom done independently? Do students frequently engage in partner work?

Have you ever tried a Think-Pair-Share or a Turn and Talk? Is there a lot of collaborative group learning in your classroom? Ask yourself these types of questions to get a sense of the way that you structure learning experiences for your students. As you reflect, begin to think of ways to vary the types of learning activities in your classroom; remember that students vary in their learning styles and preferences to communicate their understanding. One student who consistently struggles with independent work might flourish with the opportunity to work with a partner. Conversely, some learners that present as quiet and shy in a group setting might prefer to work alone and communicate ideas in writing rather than discussing with peers. Be empathetic to learning preferences by varying the types of applications you embed into your lessons.



PROVIDE EXAMPLES FOR SUCCESS

As catechists, we frequently have ideas for end products of student work. However, we

sometimes find that students have difficulty meeting our expectations. To increase student success, try providing a model so that students know what is expected. For example, if students are writing a prayer to God thanking him, write your own. Highlight the parts of your prayer that you would like students to include in their own writing, such as accurate spelling, descriptive words, or punctuation. If you would like students to remember appropriate behavior during Mass, create a visual chart that lists the important expectations, such as: stay seated, sing along, and keep hands to self. Use the chart each time you head to Mass. Your students might also benefit from a kid-friendly checklist or rubric that lays out for them the important steps to success, so that as they are working they can incorporate essential components and self-monitor. Keep in mind that students want to meet your high expectations. Make sure your expectations are clear so that they can rise to the occasion!

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Roll-of-the-Dice

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Variations

- After sharing, each person can ask one other person to share a response to the same question.
- Each person is given two "Choice" tokens (i.e. small pieces of paper with the word "choice" on them, or pennies, or poker chips). If a person rolls the number for a question they do not wish to answer, they may play a "Choice" token and choose any other question to answer.

Lottery Draw

Assign each person in the group a “lottery” number consisting of three digits. The facilitator randomly draws a number from 0-9, and asks a question. Every person in the group who has that number appearing in any of the three digits of their lottery ticket shares their response with the group. When sharing is finished, the facilitator draws a different number. **Example:** The number drawn is 6. The lottery numbers of members of a group are: Person A: 236, Person B: 870, Person C: 662, Person D: 001, Person E: 547, Person F: 069. Then persons A, C, and F would share their response to the question.

Four Corners

Gather the group in the center of the room, and explain that a statement will be read with four choices for responses. Each person must choose one of the options as their response. They then go to the corner indicated for that response. When everyone has gathered in the appropriate corners, they introduce themselves to one other person who is standing in the same area. The facilitator then reads a question and the partners share their responses with one another. After a brief time for sharing, the group gathers back in the center of the room, and a different statement is read with four choices for responses. Several rounds can be facilitated with different questions each time. Examples of “choice” statements and sharing questions:

- Choice for dessert; ice cream - apple pie - cheese cake - fudge brownie.
- What would you do if you won the lottery?
- Choice for a free Saturday: hiking - movie - read a book - wander the mall.
- Who would you like to interview from history, and what one question would you ask (excluding Jesus)?
- Choice of season for year round (assume no school): spring - summer - fall - winter.
- With a free ten day trip for two, where would you go, who would you take?
- Choice of career: medicine - law - education - business.
- Your picture and “words to live by” will appear on the cover of TIME magazine, what would they say?

17 Exciting Ways to Present Bible Stories

<https://kathleenglavich.org/articles/17-exciting-ways-to-presentreview-bible-stories>

1. Do a chalk talk with stick figures (or draw on the overhead/smart board).
2. Show slides, pictures, and posters. Give each person a small one.
3. Use flannel board figures or cutouts on the overhead.
4. Draw the story in four parts on a transparency. Cover it with a paper folded in fourths and slit along one fold. Reveal one-fourth at a time.
5. Use dolls, stuffed animals, puppets, or pipe cleaner figures.
6. Tear or fold a piece of paper as you talk.
7. Tell the story as an interview with another person (a teacher helper).
8. Take the class on a story walk for a story that has more than one setting.
9. Help children glue pictures on a large sheet of paper as the story is told.
10. Give children pictures of people or objects to hold up when mentioned.
11. Have the children draw or work with clay as you tell the story.
12. Let them say a word or do an action when they hear a certain word.
(fish = "glub, glub, glub")
13. Tell each line of the story with a movement. The children repeat each.
14. Have the class act out the story. Videotape it. Use symbols, headbands, costumes, sandwich boards, props, scenery on the board, sound effects.
15. Let the children respond in art: a mural, collage, storybook, diorama, stained-glass window, mobile, doorknob hanger, bookmark, poster, banner, greeting card, plaque, cartoon, bulletin board, mosaic, logo, model, billboard, holy card, decorated box, cutouts, or photo essay.
16. Have them respond in writing: diary entry, log, prayer, letter, acrostic, interview, scrapbook, dialogue, debate, speech, telegram, homily, play, newspaper, news article, poem, song, rap, character sketch, radio spot, choral poem, crossword puzzle, word search, eulogy, or website.
17. Reinforce the stories with a related craft, song, book, prayer, or game.

*Fifteen Ideas to Bring
Religious Education to Life*

15 Ideas to Bring Religious Education to Life

Whether your Religious Education program is just gearing up again or you are looking for new ideas to invigorate your existing program, this exclusive eBook will offer inspiration with fifteen tips for bringing Religious Education to Life.



1. Interactive Church Scavenger Hunt

We are invited to encourage students and their families to reinvigorate their faith lives. Re-familiarize them with the Church itself! Give students a list of clues that lead to places in the church. For example, a clue might be: *At this spot, you might be welcomed and initiated into the Church* (the baptismal font). This exercise will help students to learn important vocabulary and understand the purposes of different items in the church building.

2. Mock Conclave

Teach your students how the conclave process works. Then, give them each a cardinal to research and afterwards invite them to participate in a “mock conclave” in which they explain why their cardinal would make a great Pope!

3. Teaching Mass

A teaching Mass is one of the most effective ways to engage the students and encourage participation in the Mass. Invite all students to a mass in which the priest explains what is happening during respective parts, and what each prayer means and where it originated. Students understand why we do what we do at Mass, and feel more a part of it when they attend.



4. Stations of the Cross Scramble

During Lent, explain each of the Stations of the Cross to your students. Then, divide them into groups of five. Read each station number out loud (without explaining what happens), out of order, ask students to pose in a “freeze frame” of the station. See which group gets the most right.

5. Adventure Quest with Mary

In order to aid students in developing a devotion to our Blessed Mother, help them to understand the weight and gravity of the decisions she made. Set up different scenarios on a wall, have all students start at scenario 1 and end the scenario with a decision. For example: *When the Angel comes to you to ask you to be the mother of God, do you say yes or no?* Have those who answer yes proceed to scenario 2 and those who answer no proceed to scenario 3. Have different choices and their consequences reflect the differences in our salvation had Mary lived differently.



6. Get to Know your Priests

Give your students the opportunity to feel a deeper connection to their parish and its staff by hosting a question and answer session with your parish priests and deacons. Have them write questions for each on index cards in the weeks leading up to the session. This is a great chance for the students to interact with the leaders of the parish and see the priesthood in a new light.

7. Living Rosary

During a large group session (59 students, one for each bead of the rosary) give each child a battery operated tea light or a glow stick. Have them stand around the room, and each be a “bead” on the living rosary. When it is their turn, have them light their candle or glow stick and lead the prayer designated to it. Introduce each mystery as you go through. You can also do a “decade” rosary with a smaller group of children. One of the Spiritual Works of Mercy is to pray for the living and the dead! Before you begin choose someone that you will offer all of your prayers for and take pictures of the students participating in the living rosary. Send the recipient of the prayers the pictures and a card explaining that you prayed for them!





8. Morality Menu

Help students understand the importance of seeking guidance by making a morality menu. Give each child a piece of paper and ask them to write their ideal menu for breakfast, lunch and dinner every day. They can have anything they want, ice cream, cookies, pizza, and candy! Then, take each menu and correct it to be more balanced. Ask them what they think would happen if they really ate ice cream for three meals a day forever. Explain to them that they would become sick. Then explain that this is why God gives us the 10 Commandments. He knows what is good for us and is helping us to stay healthy!

9. Who's Who in the Bible

Help students come to know the different people whose stories are included in the Bible by playing a "Who's Who?" Bible trivia game. Without giving students a name, read the biblical person's scenario. For example: *I was the strongest gladiator in all of the promised land, so long as I didn't cut my hair. I was betrayed by a woman I loved, but God made me strong again.* (Sampson) This activity will demonstrate that the Bible is full of exciting and interesting stories and give students a grasp on the identities of different key figures.



10. Service

In order for students to feel connected to their faith, they need to feel like they have opportunities to live it. Inviting them to participate in service opportunities is one of the best ways to make this connection. Service projects engage students and help them see and feel their faith in action.

11. Walking Prayer

Design a walking prayer during a retreat. Make a pathway lit with luminary candles and provide reflection questions for the students to consider as they walk along. For example: *How can you feel closer to God?* At each question, students simply, stop, consider and then proceed. It is a beautiful meditative exercise!

12. Reflection Room

In the same vein as the previous suggestion, the reflection room is another way to give students an opportunity to really feel the presence of the Lord. In a room, hang poster board with different quotes from Scripture followed by a question. Ask them to record a response as they move from station to station. Have a large group sharing afterwards where students can discuss their experiences and responses.



13. Candle Prayer

Students love this activity! At the end of each class, light a battery operated candle and have students sit in a circle. Start the group in prayer by sharing your intentions, then pass the candle to your left and have each student share someone or something they want to pray for and then do the same. Students who may be uncomfortable praying aloud can pray silently and then pass the candle.

14. Sound Doctrine

Our students live in a world that is saturated with all different types of media. Find anyone of them on any given day and chances are, they are “plugged in.” Pick 3 popular and appropriate songs and print a copy of the lyrics for each student. Play the songs one at a time and point out instances where the lyrics may remind you of the love God has for us, his forgiveness, or our desire to know him. This exercise helps students connect the Scripture, God, or the saints with media that is relevant to their lives.



15. Screenings

Choose a movie a few times throughout the year and host a large group screening. Follow it with dinner and discussion to help the students truly process what the film is trying to tell them about God and the faith.

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11 Tips for Catechists

BY JOE PAPROCKI



Planning and preparation are key to the success of any catechist. Here are 11 tips to help you with your lesson planning.

1. Do long-range planning. The lesson you are planning is only part of a larger plan for the whole year. Make sure you get a picture of the whole calendar year, and see how much time you have to carry out what you hope to accomplish. Get a good feel for how this lesson can build on the previous one and lay the foundation for the next.

2. Get to know your text and the children in your group. Get to know your textbook's philosophy, strategies, approaches, strengths, and weaknesses. Get a sense of the whole book, and then zero in on a set of chapters or a unit to see how each lesson fits in with the whole. At the same time, get to know the children in your group and how capable they are of handling the text as it is written. Make adjustments as needed.

3. Examine the teacher notes in the catechist manual. A catechist manual is often a catechist's best friend. Catechetical texts like *Christ Our Life* and *Finding God* have excellent catechist manuals that lay out the lesson much like a blueprint and offer step-by-step instructions. The more you familiarize yourself with the teacher notes, the better you will be able to implement your lesson and still leave room for spontaneity.

4. Imagine yourself teaching the lesson. Use your imagination to visualize the lesson you are about to teach. Imagine every possible scenario and how you would react. Picture how much time each segment of your lesson is going to take. Keep a notepad nearby to jot down ideas that can become part of your lesson. Write down a list of materials that you will need for certain situations. Imagine problems that might arise and visualize how you may best handle them. With this visualization complete, you will feel as though you've already taught this lesson once and are now building upon it.

5. Make adjustments to fit the needs of your learners. No lesson plan is ironclad and unchangeable. Once you've picked up the main focus of the lesson, think of your learners and their unique needs and make any necessary adjustments. You may have children that are not very talkative, but the lesson calls for discussion. Perhaps you will need to adjust to allow for some nonverbal form of expression. Whatever the case, the better you know your learners, the better you'll be able to make adjustments so that the lesson will be as effective as possible.

6. Know your learning outcomes (objectives). Know what the children are supposed to be able to know and/or do as a result of the lesson. Learning outcomes (sometimes referred to as “objectives”) state concretely and in measurable terms what it is that your learners should be able to know and do when the session is complete. Most catechetical textbooks articulate the learning outcomes for a lesson. Without these stated learning outcomes, you would never have any hope of knowing whether you’ve accomplished what you had set out to do.

7. Follow a catechetical process. Think of your lesson as a movement: you want to move your learners from where they are to where Jesus wants them to be. St. Ignatius of Loyola described this as entering through their door but leaving through your door. This movement, called the catechetical process, involves four steps:

- Engaging the life experience of the children.
- Exploring the concepts to be taught (Scripture and Tradition).
- Reflecting and integrating the concepts with the lived experience.
- Responding with a new way of living.

8. Get your materials ready. Be sure that you have all the materials you will need to complete the lesson. There’s nothing worse than reaching a point in the lesson when you tell children to cut pictures out of magazines only to find out that you don’t have scissors (or magazines). Visualizing the lesson ahead of time will help you see what materials you will need that perhaps were not listed in the instructor manual.

9. Have Plan B ready. Always have an option ready in case something falls flat, takes less time than expected, or just isn’t working the way you had hoped. Be sure to have materials on hand for alternate activities.

10. Overplan. It is always better to prepare more than you think you’ll need. Until you learn how to effectively gauge your time, it is quite possible that what you think will comprise an entire session will only cover half of the allotted time. When this happens, panic tends to set in. On the other hand, if you have more material than you need, you can relax and decide how to adjust your next session to make room for what you didn’t accomplish in this session.

11. Pray. Before you sit down to plan a lesson, take some time to pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Do your planning and preparation in a prayerful environment. Light a candle. Play some instrumental music. Place a Bible on the table next to you. Dim the lights. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide you, and to give you the help you need to be focused, loving, and creative.

The *Christ Our Life* and *Finding God* programs from Loyola Press both offer online lesson planning to help you prepare so that class time runs smoothly.

5 WAYS TO WONDER WITH KIDS

Encouraging curiosity in kids helps them want to learn more. A sense of wonder is an important part of their faith development too! Here are five ways to promote curiosity and wonder in your family life.

1 SLOW DOWN

Walk at your child's pace and try to physically get on their level when possible. See the world through their eyes and wonder together at the things they're experiencing. Use a magnifying glass to look even closer at God's amazing creation.

2 ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS

Questions are a good thing! They come from a place of curiosity as children try to make sense of day-to-day life. Try your best to react positively to questions, even if you've already answered *hundreds* of them today.

3 EMBRACE THE UNKNOWN

If your child asks you a question that you don't know the answer to (and can't look up online), admit that you don't know. Wonder along with them what the answer might be and remind them that part of the mystery of God is that we don't know all the answers.

4 DEVELOP EMPATHY

Wondering is a great way to help your kids walk a mile in other people's shoes. When something amazing or difficult happens, ask questions like "I wonder what she thought when that happened . . . ?" or "I wonder how that made her feel . . . ?"

5 PAUSE AND REFLECT WHEN EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

Take time to wonder together about the people, places, and events in the Bible stories your child hears in children's ministry. Ask your child, "What do you wonder about this story?" Their answer will give you insight into their thinking, and it will probably deepen your own understanding too.

5 WAYS TO

RETELL A BIBLE STORY WITH KIDS

A great way for kids (and adults!) to remember God's story and to experience it more deeply is to retell it in ways that engage their head, heart, and hands.

Get inspired with these easy ideas for retelling a Bible story.

1 BUILD

Use building blocks or play dough to recreate scenes from the story. Work together or build scenes individually and then show and tell each other about what you've made.

2 DRAW

There are lots of ways to use art to tell stories: Have each person draw a picture of a different part of the story; then put the pictures together and tell the story again. Pick a word from the story and illustrate it. Make a cartoon strip. Sketch pictures of what you're imagining as the story or text is being read; then compare your thoughts.

3 SING

Make up a tune (or use one that's familiar), and turn the story into a song. Or look for a version of the story that's already been recorded, and learn it together. (We love the Bible story songs written and recorded by *Rain for Roots*.)

4 ACT

Use puppets (socks, dolls, or utensils will do!) or yourselves to act out the story. Consider taking photos of each scene and printing them as a book or comic strip. Another fun idea is to assign readers to read the dialog and/or assign sound effects to particular words, and to reread the story together.

5 WONDER

Ask open-ended questions that have no "right or wrong" answers. For example,

- **I wonder what . . .** (I wonder what Jonah thought about inside the fish . . . ?
I wonder what you would have thought about . . . ?)
- **I wonder how . . .** (I wonder how it felt to cross the Red Sea . . . ?
I wonder how this story makes you feel . . . ?)
- **I wonder who . . .** (I wonder who the shepherds told first about meeting baby Jesus . . . ?
I wonder who you would have run to tell . . . ?)
- **I wonder why . . .** (I wonder why Jesus told stories to people . . . ?
I wonder why we don't always do what God asks us to do . . . ?)

5 WAYS TO PRAY WITH KIDS

Prayer is an anytime and anywhere conversation with God—no fancy words required! The five ways to pray listed below are easy and meaningful to do. Use them with your family to encourage ongoing conversations with God.

1 KEEP A PRAYER JOURNAL

Write prayer concerns in a notebook, on a calendar, or on paper “leaves” that you hang from a branch in a vase. Then go back and look at the ways God answers those prayers over time.

2 TRY CIRCLE PRAYERS

Hold hands and take turns praying one sentence at a time for each “round.” You may find it helpful to focus your prayer by using this kid-friendly version of the “ACTS” model, replacing Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication with these prompts:

- “God, you are . . . ”
- “I’m sorry for . . . ”
- “Thank you for . . . ”
- “Please . . . ”

3 BUILD YOUR PRAYERS

Have each person create a shape that represents what they’d like to pray about. LEGO™ bricks, play dough, or pipe cleaners work well! Then pray about those things.

4 TAKE PRAYER WALKS

Name and pray about the things and people you see while walking in your neighborhood. Broaden your child’s sense of community by also praying for the people and places you locate together on a map or globe.

5 JUST BREATHE

Teach your kids a simple prayer verse or phrase to silently repeat while inhaling and exhaling. This is a great way to calm their spirit and/or help them focus as you enter into prayer together. For example, “When I am afraid, / I put my trust in you” (Psalm 56:3) or “Be still, and know / that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

5 WAYS TO

PRACTICE JUSTICE AND MERCY WITH KIDS

Justice and mercy are the tangible expressions of loving our neighbors as God has loved us. They are the ways that we live like Jesus here and now, affirming the goodness of God's image in others. Raising kids who practice justice and mercy is some of the most faith-forming work you'll ever do as a parent. The 5 "L"s that follow are designed to help.

1 LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Nurturing a heart for justice and mercy in kids means modeling those qualities daily. Talk with your kids about God's desire that all people will flourish. Let them see you actively loving people in need. Practice mercy in your conversations with and about others. Invite your kids into decisions about the things you buy and the causes you support.

2 LISTEN AND LEARN

Seek opportunities to hear the voices of people who experience injustice and people who work to bring about justice. Nurture diverse friendships. Select books and other media created by people from a variety of backgrounds. Work to identify and resist your own biases. Teach your kids the importance of researching issues well.

3 LAMENT

Pray together about the brokenness of the world. "Mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15). Seek God's forgiveness for the ways in which you have acted unjustly. Ask the Spirit to show you where your heart needs to change and how you can work for justice and show mercy.

4 LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES

Have regular conversations about injustice. Ask questions like "How does this go against God's plan for the world?" and "What might God want us to do about that?" Equip kids with the words and courage they need to speak up when they encounter injustice. Participate in justice-seeking events in your area. Be an encourager when your kids find an issue about which they are passionate.

5 LOVE ALL

Look for the threads of justice that run throughout Scripture as you read it together. Make Matthew 22:37-39 part of your family motto. Talk about what it means; make a list together of what living that love looks like in your daily life. Revisit that list often, adding to it and sharing stories of your experiences as you try to live in tune with God's love for all.

Want to dig deeper? Check out the Faith Practices Project's family resources on justice and mercy at crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject.

5 WAYS TO PRACTICE GENEROSITY WITH KIDS

Generosity is freely sharing with others the many gifts God has given us.

Our God is an abundantly generous God! When we feel gratitude for God's many gifts to us, that gratitude overflows in generosity. Here are five of God's wonderful gifts, along with suggestions for how you and your kids can share these gifts generously with others.

1 THE GIFT OF CREATION

God gifted us with an incredible world to care for! Find ways to share it with your kids and help them care for it in service to others. If you have a family garden, share what you grow. Invite others to spend time with your family enjoying nature outdoors. Organize or participate in a neighborhood cleanup; volunteer at an animal shelter. Pick up trash at a local park.

2 THE GIFT OF SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Jesus gave all that he had for others. In your family, do everything you can to model and share that kind of love! Assure your kids daily of your love for them. Care for the people around you who are hurting. Share your possessions without complaint, and encourage your kids to do the same. Look for ways to tell others about God's abundant love.

3 THE GIFT OF UNIQUE ABILITIES

Make a list of the unique gifts and talents with which God has gifted each member of your family. Now add to the list ways to share those abilities with others. What are you doing already? What might you do in the future? Ask the Holy Spirit to nudge you when there are opportunities to share your family's gifts.

4 THE GIFT OF MATERIAL RESOURCES

Sharing your stuff can be hard for kids—and for adults too! Talk about the fact that all we have comes from God. Give kids ownership in the practice of generosity by asking, "Is there something you could share?" or "I wonder how you could bless [name] with something you have?" Help young children practice generosity by giving them extra snacks or other items to share on playdates. Involve older kids in choosing organizations to support with donations.

5 THE GIFT OF TIME

God has given each of us a lifetime in which to serve God and our neighbor. Talk with kids often about how God might be calling them to spend their days, both now and in the future. Volunteer enthusiastically with your kids. Take time to listen deeply to each other and to people in pain. As a family, make space for regular sabbath rest.