

The Spirituality of the Catechist

Purpose

This retreat experience will give catechists the opportunity to reflect on passages from the Scriptures that are pertinent to their vocation as catechists. They will use the Scriptures to help them discern how they can deepen their relationship with Christ to be more effective in their ministry. The retreat takes about 2 hours.

Materials Needed

- Bibles for leader and participants
- Candle
- Table and chairs (if retreat is conducted in a room other than a chapel)
- CD player, and appropriate sacred music on CD
- Hymnals or song sheets
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of the handouts for each participant (“Reflection on the Call to Ministry of the Catechist” and “Reflection on Personal Spiritual Growth”)

Preparation

- Have a prayer table covered with a cloth reflecting the liturgical season. The table could have a Bible, a candle, and some item(s) to reflect the personality of your group.
- Have a CD of appropriate church music playing softly as the catechists gather.
- Refreshments can be provided as catechists enter, especially if they are coming directly from work.
- Have copies of the Bible and the program handouts for each catechist.

Schedule

Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

First Presentation: Guided Meditation (30 minutes)

Second Presentation: Reflection on the Call to Ministry of a Catechist (30 minutes)

Break (10 minutes)

Third Presentation: Reflection on Personal Spiritual Growth (30 minutes)

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

As catechists arrive, invite them to take a seat in a comfortable location, preferably in a circle. Once catechists have gathered at their places and have introduced themselves, begin with the following dialogue or similar.

Leader: Thank you so much for responding to our parish's need for catechists this year. In your role, you are called to be "echoers" of Christ. That is the meaning of the word "catechist." During our time together we will explore just what it means to *echo* Christ: investigating some means by which we can all deepen our personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and discussing ideas for how we can better prepare ourselves for this awesome ministry.

Let us begin with prayer.

In the name of the Father . . . *(All make the Sign of the Cross.)*

Let's take a moment to center ourselves in the love of God, which surrounds us everywhere and always.

Pause for a moment of silence. Play soft music, if desired.

If it is possible to have a candle, light the candle and place it on the prayer table, and then recite the following prayer.

Leader: As this candle is lit, may it remind us of the fire and zeal of Pentecost, which inflamed our hearts at Baptism. May the Holy Spirit of God's love continue to ignite our hearts with a burning desire to share God's love and life with others.

Sing an appropriate song, such as one of the following:

"Christ Be Beside Me" (Peter Cutts, World Library Publications)

"Jesus, Come to Us" (David Haas, OCP Publications)

Continue with the following petitions.

Leader: As we come together in prayer, let us place our intentions and cares before our Lord, who has promised to be with us and answer all our needs. Please respond:

R/. We lift our needs to you, Lord God.

All repeat the response.

Leader: For all those who share God's Word throughout the world, we pray. **R/.**
For those who suffer for their belief in God, we pray. **R/.**
For people oppressed throughout the world, we pray. **R/.**
For the people of our parish, we pray. **R/.**
For those we catechize this year, we pray. **R/.**
For the needs we hold in our hearts . . .

Allow time for people to speak their individual intentions.

For all our needs, both spoken and unspoken, we pray. **R/.**

Let us pray. Gracious and loving Father, we place our hopes, cares, and concerns with you, confident that you will hold us all close to your loving care. Be with us in this time together. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, open our minds and hearts that we might be faithful to you always. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord. Amen.

First Presentation: Guided Meditation (30 minutes)

Begin the guided meditation with the following introduction or similar.

Leader: Here we sit together around the Word of God. We come from different backgrounds. Each of us has his or her own unique love story with God. One thing we do share in common is the fact that, for whatever reason, the Holy Spirit has touched each of our hearts and invited us to be catechists this year.

Jesus gathered a diverse group of his followers around him. He also gave them a commission and a promise that extends to us today. Let us listen once again to the story of the Ascension and hear Jesus speak to us.

Read Matthew 28:16-20. Pause for a moment, and then begin the following meditation slowly. At each ellipsis (. . .), pause briefly to give the catechists a moment for reflection.

Close your eyes, if you like, and imagine you are with "the Eleven" as they make their way to the mountain in Galilee. Jesus has asked you all to come so he can make his farewells. . . . With whom are you walking? . . . What do you see as you walk along the way? What sounds do you hear? Do you feel the heat of the sun? . . . How do the disciples seem? . . . Are they excited to see Jesus once again? Are some of them anxious about what will happen? Do you hear snatches of conversations as you walk along? . . . What do you hear? . . .

You finally make it to the mountaintop. There is Jesus, waiting for you. Listen to the others as they greet Jesus. What do you see? What do you hear? . . .

Jesus steps back from all of you. He looks at each of you with love in his heart and commissions you, his disciples, with these words: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” . . .

Watch Peter. Look at John. How do they react to Jesus’ words? . . .

You happen to look up at Jesus and realize that he is looking directly at you. You hear him say, “I am with you always.” How does that make you feel? . . .

Jesus goes on to say, “Teach all that I have commanded you.” What does that mean to you? . . .

Speak to Jesus now. Ask for his help as you prepare for this year. Tell Jesus what you need from him. . . . Listen as he speaks to your heart. . . .

Allow a few minutes for quiet reflection.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

Depending on the size of the group, conduct the following sharing activity either with the whole group or in smaller sets.

Share:

- What was it like as you walked up the mountain?
- With whom were you walking?
- What was your conversation like?
- What happened when you all encountered Jesus?
- How did the disciples react to Jesus’ commission?

Second Presentation: Reflection on the Call to Ministry of the Catechist (30 minutes)

Begin the reflection on the catechist’s call to ministry with the following introduction or similar.

Leader: Jesus has indeed commissioned each of us to go forth and teach in his name. He is with us as he promised. He has given us the Holy Spirit in Baptism and sealed us

with the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. Jesus nourishes us with his living body in the Eucharist. Jesus has called you to be his witness to those you teach this year.

How will you answer Jesus' call? How will you prepare so that those whom you catechize this year will realize who they are called to be—and do—in Christ?

Invite catechists to refer to the handout “Reflection on the Call to Ministry of the Catechist.” Ask them to read the first section, “The Call of the Catechist,” taken from the *National Directory for Catechesis*. Invite them to spend some time reflecting on the questions and writing their responses. After about 15 minutes, invite the catechists to share their observations on the topic of the call of the catechist, especially on what this call means for them personally.

Break (10 minutes)

Third Presentation: Reflection on Personal Spiritual Growth (30 minutes)

Begin the reflection on personal spiritual growth with the following introduction or similar.

Leader: So far we have been reminded of our call from the Scriptures and have reflected on the powerful presence of Christ with us until the end of time. We have also reflected on the need to be faithfully prepared for our ministry as catechist. Now we need to attend to our own spiritual life in order to share the Good News of God's love with others.

Invite different catechists to read each of the characteristics listed in the section “The Spiritual Characteristics of a Catechist” on the handout “Reflection on Personal Spiritual Growth.” Take time to discuss either in small groups or as one large group why these characteristics are significant for a catechist.

Next, invite each catechist to personally reflect on the questions noted on the handout as an aid for developing his or her own personal spiritual growth.

Allow some time for personal reflection with the group. You might like to have soft music playing as the catechists prayerfully reflect on their personal spirituality in relation to their ministry as catechists.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Conclude the retreat with the following prayer. At each ellipsis (. . .), pause briefly to give the catechists a moment for reflection.

Leader: As we prepare to take leave, let us spend a few moments in quiet contemplation on what each of us has learned about Jesus Christ in this time together. . . . What we

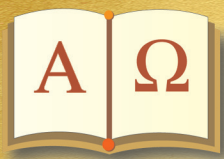
have learned about the ministry of the catechist? . . . What we have learned about our own need for growth to be better able to “echo Christ”? . . .

In our earlier meditation we engaged Christ in conversation. Let us take some time now to speak with him about what we have learned about him and about ourselves. Ask for his help. . . .

Allow a few moments for quiet, prayerful reflection. Before the final prayer, sing an appropriate song, such as one of the following:

“May God Bless You with His Love” (George Van Grieken, FSC, OCP Publications)
“You Are Mine” (David Haas, GIA Publications).

Leader: As we go forth from this gathering renewed in our love for God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, may our catechetical efforts bear fruit in leading others to share more deeply in the life and love of the Trinity through Christ Jesus. Amen. (*All make the Sign of the Cross.*)



The Spirituality of the Catechist: Handout 1

Reflection on the Call to Ministry of the Catechist

The Call of the Catechist

The call to the ministry of catechist is a vocation, an interior call, the voice of the Holy Spirit. Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal worship and life of the Church and who have been prepared for their apostolate by appropriate catechetical teaching.

—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB),
National Directory for Catechesis, §54.B (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005)

Questions for Reflection

How did I feel called to be a catechist this year?

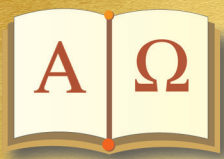
How do I participate fully in the worship and life of the Church?

Which weekend parish Mass do I regularly attend?

How do I live out the dismissal: “The Mass is ended. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord”?

How have I prepared for my ministry of catechesis?

What can I do this year to be better prepared for my ministry?



The Spirituality of the Catechist: Handout 2

Reflection on the Call to Ministry of the Catechist

Reflection on Personal Spiritual Growth

The Spiritual Characteristics of a Catechist

The spiritual life of a catechist should be characterized by

- A love of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and of Christ’s Church, our Holy Father, and God’s holy people
- A coherence and authenticity of life that is characterized by their faithful practice of the faith in a spirit of faith, charity, hope, courage, and joy
- Personal prayer and dedication to the evangelizing mission of the Church
- A missionary zeal by which they are fully convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith and enthusiastically proclaim it
- Active participation in their local parish community, especially by their attendance at Sunday Eucharist
- A devotion to Mary, the first disciple and the model of catechists, and to the Most Holy Eucharist, the source of nourishment for catechists

—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB),
National Directory for Catechesis, §54.B (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005)

Questions for Reflection

Which of the spiritual characteristics of a catechist best describes you? Why?

Which characteristic provides the biggest challenge for you to work on this year? How?

Why are all these characteristics important as you seek to “echo Christ” this year?