

# Growing as a Catechist



## A Practical Guide

by  
Daniel J. Pierson & Susan Stark

**Faith Alive Books**

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# *Becoming a Capable Catechist*

“I feel like a fake. I’m not qualified to do this.” You may be unsure or insecure about teaching religion, but this does not mean that you are incapable. A theology degree or teaching credential is not a prerequisite for helping form young people in the faith.

Melanie, now a parent with grade school children of her own, still remembers the college student who taught her sixth grade religion class, not because this particular catechist had any training (she didn’t), but Melanie will never forget how enthusiastic she was about her faith, and how much fun she was.

How you interact with the children in your session will have far more impact than what you teach. Sure, you hope they will remember the prayers you teach and pray with them. And you hope they’ll learn about Jesus’ forgiveness. And they will—from their books, yes, but also from your witness. You will also help them see the need for forgiveness in their own lives.

What you teach is important, but being able to recite Church doctrine in your sleep is not necessarily going to help the children see the presence of God in you or in them. What are your most important credentials as a volunteer catechist?

- Are you a faith-filled person who cares about young people?
- Are you excited about being Catholic and eager to share your faith with others?
- Do you recognize your baptismal call to share your gifts in service to others?
- Are you open to the challenge of learning more about your faith?
- Are you willing to be a model of what it means to be a healthy, caring Christian living in the world today?

*No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with the person of the catechist in every phase of the catechetical process. The charism given to him by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life, constitutes the soul of every method. Only his own human and Christian qualities guarantee a good use of texts and other work instruments.*

—General Directory for Catechesis, #156

# *Characteristics of an Effective Catechist*

“What might be a list of some of the characteristics of an effective catechist?” Below is our list. Choose one characteristic that can serve as a goal for your development throughout the year. Talk with other catechists, meet with your catechetical leader, read, observe, and practice.

Effective catechists—

1. Know and try to master the subject matter. Effective catechists strive to grow in their understanding of the content that is being presented.
2. Know and respect the children. What are their interests? What are their emotional, social, and cognitive abilities? What are the best methods for teaching and learning?
3. Have positive expectations for success. Expect children to participate and learn. As a catechist, “get right down to business” while enthusiastically presenting the content in a caring and structured environment.
4. Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. Create your own lesson plan for each session. Never wing it! It is a simple equation—the better prepared you are the more effective you will be.
5. Check for understanding, learning, and application. Our goal is that by the end of each session the children will know, appreciate, and be able to practice the topic that we present. Ask the children to tell you what they heard you say, one thing they will tell their parents, and what they will do in the coming week.
6. Provide an active and well-ordered learning environment. Children thrive with structure, routine, and consistent procedures. Write out your expectations clearly and positively, develop rewards and consequences for positive and negative behavior, and communicate expectations and instructions clearly.
7. Keep it Simple. Be selective. Don’t try to do everything. Choose only a few strategies to develop the main message of the lesson.

*Without involvement, there is no commitment.*

—Stephen R. Covey, *First Things First*