

Called to Be a Catechist

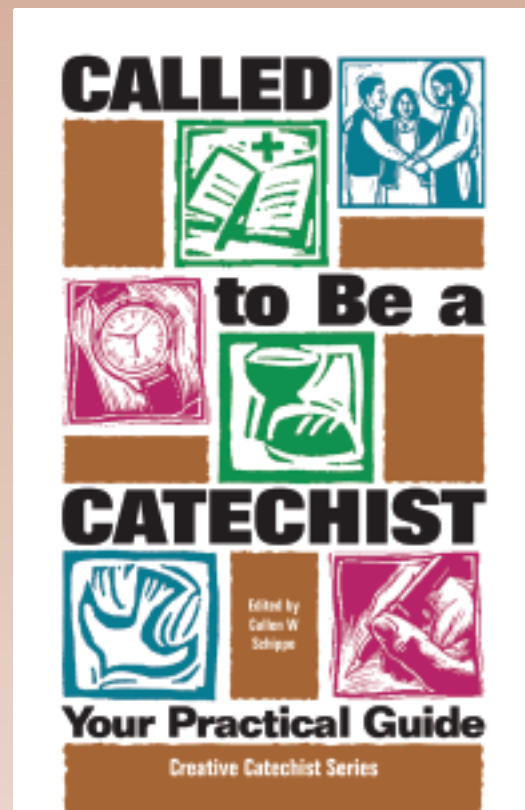
Your Practical Guide

Edited by Cullen W. Schippe

The new *National Directory for Catechesis* encourages the solid and continuing formation of catechists – and this just-revised little book provides an important part of that formation.

As a practical guide it sets up, in its five short chapters, what a catechist needs to know about his or her mission, about growth in a catechetical spirit, about knowing the faith, about understanding the students, about keeping learning active and engaging, and about developing good catechetical habits.

Called to Be a Catechist also provides a quick-reference glossary that is culled from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This Guide makes a great gift for all the catechists in the parish – both the new and seasoned ones.

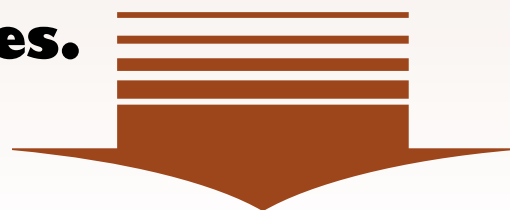


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Introduction

Catechists must hand on the teachings of Christ to those being catechized; they must prepare them for the sacraments instituted by Christ; they must orient them toward life lived according to the moral teaching of Christ; and they must lead them to pray with Christ. Catechists must make the words of Christ their own; “My teaching is not my own but it is from the one who sent me,” and they confess with Saint Paul, “I handed on to you ... what I also received.”

National Directory for Catechesis, page 101

Thank you for hearing and answering the call you received to serve your parish community by being a volunteer catechist. You are fulfilling an important ministry in the Church by participating in spreading the Good News and handing on the treasures of the Catholic Faith.

The work you have agreed to do can indeed be a little scary—particularly if you don’t have a lot of teaching experience. This little book won’t calm all your fears or turn you instantly into a “Catechist of the Year,” but we hope it will provide you with some inspiration and practical help—some “on the fly” formation for this important ministry.

The first three chapters of this book focus on you—who you are as a catechist, what kind of spirit you can have, and how you can learn more about the faith you share. The next three chapters focus on those to whom you minister—your students. These chapters help you see just who they are, how to keep them actively engaged in learning, and some good habits you can develop that will help your students. And there is a “quick-reference” glossary, too.

This guide is part of your personal catechetical tool kit, but it certainly should not be the only tool. We recommend that you treat yourself to four other tools to put into use in making you a better and more confident catechist:

1. **A Bible:** Make sure that you have an everyday Bible—not a fancy one with gold-edged pages. Get a Bible (Old and New Testament both) that you can write in, fold over pages, and mark with tabs and “stickies.” This is a must.
2. **The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC):** It is important to have a copy of the official Catechism. Reading and studying the Catechism can help you grow in your understanding and appreciation of your Catholic Faith, and it will help you stay focused on your task.
3. **The General Directory for Catechesis (GDC):** This book provides the attitudes and marching orders that parallel the content of the faith you find in the Catechism. It is not an easy book, but it is a very important one.
4. **The National Directory for Catechesis (NDC):** This book guides the Church in the United States in its catechetical ministry. It is quite new and very valuable.

As far as this little book is concerned, there is no need to read it all at once. Keep it handy, and use it any way you see fit. We hope it helps you find joy and satisfaction in your important ministry.



Chapter 5

Keep Learning Active

Catechesis links human experience to the revealed word of God, helping people ascribe Christian meaning to their own existence. It enables people to explore, interpret, and judge their basic experiences in light of the Gospel. Catechesis helps them relate the Christian message to the most profound questions in life; the existence of God, the destiny of the human person, the origin and end of history, the truth about good and evil, the meaning of suffering and death, and so forth. By recalling God's salvific action in human history, catechesis helps people to recognize their need for conversion and leads them to conversion in Christ.

NDC, page 98

If you have ever been to a talk or a class in a huge lecture hall, you may have had the experience of listening to someone give a well-crafted presentation of some topic to the group. Everyone dutifully would take notes. When the presentation was over, the person left the room. If the talk was very good, this may have been a fairly satisfying experience, but not an ideal situation for catechesis.

As a catechist, your mission is much more than telling your students about the wonders of the Catholic Faith, the Holy Bible, the liturgy of the Church, the steps in following Jesus, or Christian prayer. Your task is to keep them actively engaged in the process. The songs you sing together, the pictures you draw, the skits you perform, the ritual actions you share, the questions and answers, the quizzes, and the memorization—all those little elements keep the learning active.

Methodology

You know the power of God's Word. As the Prophet Isaiah said about the Word of God, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (*Isaiah 55:10-11*).

God's own methodology included sending the Word made Flesh—his only Son—to make known the mysteries of his divine plan. The life and teaching of Jesus were active and on the move. The life, death, resurrection, and glorious ascension of Jesus Christ were teaching moments that demanded a response. When the Apostles at Pentecost—filled with the Holy Spirit—gave out the Good News, the response of their "students" was "What shall we do?" From the very earliest days in the life of the Church, that catechesis has continued.

Any and all methods you employ as a catechist are aimed not at the knowledge, but at the response of faith on the part of the learner. To do that, the learner needs to be actively engaged in the process. And so, whatever methods you use when you are in the classroom, you want to

- Emphasize God's call and the learner's free response
- Accept that you can't teach everything at once and need to adapt what you are teaching to the level of your student
- Always show the centrality of Jesus Christ
- Demonstrate and give value to the Christian community
- Enter a relationship with your students and give them a chance for dialog
- Draw on signs, symbols, and exercises that link words with deeds and learning with experience

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