

Echoes and Distance Learning

by Jo Rotunno

This month's *Catechetical Leader* Update, in its focus on distance learning, raises some interesting questions regarding the implementation of *Echoes of Faith*. Distance learning, in its broadest sense, refers to any number of ways that an individual might learn an organized body of material away from a school or parish campus. Some of these ways might be online courses or self-directed home study courses in a print and/or video format. For some people, such courses are the most efficient and convenient way to acquire new information. Work schedules or distance from the school or parish may make them the only viable alternative. But does the home study format work for catechist formation?

The answer is a very qualified "maybe." *Echoes of Faith* was designed with busy people in mind—those who might have trouble attending a group format parish-based program. The modular structure, with video and booklet wedded to each other in a self-directed format, can appeal to just this segment of your catechist population.

One of the goals of *Echoes* was to provide a baseline for catechist training that would be accessible to most catechists. But *Echoes of Faith* is more than a training program, and its goal is more than the acquisition of skills. It offers a process for catechist *formation*, and for Christians, formation always includes the presence and context of a community of faith. *Echoes* modules watched and processed alone would be useful, but the process they contain could be used to better advantage. Let's look at some more formational ways of using *Echoes*...

Group Setting: If you can manage it, a group setting is absolutely the best choice. Video segments can be watched together. Then, in the processing of the segments, catechists have the benefit of the wisdom of the group as they reflect on the video input and choose ways to apply their new knowledge in their catechetical settings. Another advantage is the opportunity for participants to share prayer and reflection on their faith journeys. Catechists who are formed in such a way will consistently make a deeper commitment to their ministry.

Home/Parish Combo Setting: In some places, such as rural areas, it may work best to have individual catechists view the video and work through the booklet process alone at home. After all catechists have done so, you can gather them all at the parish for shared reflection, a discussion of some of the booklet application activities, and prayer.

Companion Approach: There may be times when individual catechists are unable to participate in any sort of regular group formation. In that case, you can offer them the option of pairing with another catechist companion with whom they can share insights and reflections. Together they can devise ways to apply new learning in the classroom.

Whichever way you choose to implement *Echoes of Faith*, just remember that a faith community counts if you wish to form capable, committed catechists.

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