

Do Your Catechists Have a Growth Plan?

By Jo Rotunno

My first year as a catechist was a mixed experience. I began the year feeling I had all the skills I needed. I was, after all, a Catholic school teacher. I enjoyed working with nine-year-olds, but as the year went on I gradually realized the difference between faith formation and classroom teaching. My DRE was patient with me and helped me discover for myself the gaps in my own preparation. Within a year I was immersed in workshops and then in catechist formation. I began what became thirty-five rich and energizing years attending the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress. I found myself always hungry for more, and eventually got a master's degree in Religious Studies. Preparing and nurturing catechists has become a lifelong vocation.

As you look over your catechist community this fall, where are their strengths and weaknesses? Some in the group are there strictly as temporary volunteers who want to help out in their children's program. Others are truly committed to the ministry of catechesis and some are outstanding leaders who can become mentors to others in your program. A few may be burned out, or have decided that there is little new to learn. (They are the dangerous ones!) No matter where each of your catechists fall on this spectrum, they all need a growth plan for the year.

The ***Echoes of Faith Plus*** Program Director's Manual has some forms that can help your catechists plan ways to grow. One is a Catechist Profile that you can use with brand new catechists. It assesses their background and invites them to choose a way to grow as a catechist during the coming year. ***Echoes of Faith Plus*** modules are among the options offered. There is a similar form for more experienced catechists. With this more seasoned group, consider some of the bonus interviews as an enrichment option.

Bear in mind that most beginning catechists may not yet be committed enough to offer much more than preparing and teaching a weekly session. Be brave! You really do have the right to challenge them to a little bit more. It took my DRE two years of prodding to get me to a catechist formation center. But she did not hesitate to press me to commit to a workshop or two.

At the end of the year, it's always a good idea to invite catechists to assess their year in ministry. The End-of-Year Catechist Interview form is a good device to help with their assessment. The first side of the form invites catechists to evaluate their overall experience as a catechist the past year, to name what they learned about themselves and their skills, and to make suggestions for the future. The back side of the form is specifically directed toward their experience of ***Echoes of Faith Plus***.

None of us has yet reached the point in our ministry where we can say with assurance that we truly teach as Jesus did, consistently and with the same measure of love and compassion. We are all companions on the journey, looking for better and better ways to share the gift of faith with those who hunger to hear it. *Echoes of Faith Plus* is just one way to help that love of catechesis come alive in others.

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