

Interactive *Echoes*

By Jo Rotunno

This month we are launching our Web site for the ongoing support of *Echoes of Faith* and we invite you to visit the site soon. You'll find it at EchoesofFaith.com. There are two features on this Web site that I'd like to bring to your attention. One is an ongoing Catechetical Forum for catechists. Catechists can type in their practical or theological questions and we promise a response within twenty-four hours. This feature will be staffed by one of our RCL Benziger consultants and occasionally by a guest host drawn from the NCCL ranks.

Another exciting new feature is a bulletin board where diocesan staff members or parish catechetical leaders can share their experiences with *Echoes*. As you know so well, sometimes it is the shared experience of another parish or diocese that stimulates your own imagination. You'll find this feature by clicking on the Resources for DREs link on the home page.

As we begin another season in the catechetical ministry, I'd like to share with you a few ideas generated by our RCL Benziger staff for using *Echoes of Faith* in new and innovative ways.

Joint Formation Days. Over my many years in the catechetical ministry, I've heard one concern expressed over and over by parish catechetical leaders. It involves the gulf that sometimes exists between the Catholic school and the parish catechetical program. Sometimes the issues involve shared space or an inequitable distribution of resources. Sometimes the disconnect is simply a result of busy schedules and differing priorities. Yet we all know that most progress begins with small steps taken at the local level.

Why not invite the school religion coordinator to partner with you in creating a catechetical training day using an *Echoes* module? For example, you might use the Scriptures module as a two-session training event that could launch a year-long emphasis on Scripture in the classroom. The first session would lay the foundation for a Catholic understanding of Sacred Scripture. (Note: Remember that each segment of the theology modules will take you at least 1-1 ½ hours to process properly.) The second day could be a practical exploration of ways that both the parish and school programs can place a greater emphasis on Sacred Scripture in the coming year. The bonus interviews on this module could provide content for follow-up training days during the year. At the end of the year, gather both staffs for a joint meeting to discuss improvements they see in their own and in the children's awareness of the importance of the Bible in Catholic life.

Partner in Ministry Days. Many parish catechetical leaders also acknowledge that they have not yet achieved the true partnership they seek between parents and catechists in the faith formation of children and youth. You could take the same idea described above and adapt it to develop joint formation days for parents and catechists. It would be a great opportunity to communicate to parents the importance that your program places on the role of Sacred Scripture in the life of faith. It could also be a good time to brainstorm ways that both catechists and parents can create opportunities for the sharing of Scripture in both the home and parish settings.

Mentoring Model. In spite of your best efforts, you know that there are catechists who will not be able to attend a large group formation center. On the other hand, you know that formation occurs best in community. One alternative is to pair a beginning catechist with a well-seasoned one. Invite the beginner to choose an area of growth and match a module to his or her need. Using Echoes booklets with CD-Rom, have them each watch a video segment on their home computers and reflect on the corresponding booklet process. Then, either over the phone or in face-to-face sharing (preferred), invite them to share their reflections with each other. Enhance this model by having beginners observe sessions with veteran catechists during the year.

Empowerment Strategy. Let's face it, you can't do everything yourself. Begin to empower your veteran catechists by giving them the opportunity to process an Echoes Plus module with different groups of learners. Meet with the veteran catechists ahead of time and walk through the workshop process with them. Have them begin by working with a small group of 3–5 catechists before moving up to a large group session. Sharing the workload with others will build commitment in your whole body of catechists and empower them to hand on their wisdom to others.

However you decide to use Echoes of Faith this year, we hope that you will share your successes with us via our Web site or by contacting us directly. Just as RCL Benziger is a partner with NCCL in the Echoes project, we want to be your partner in the whole work of parish faith formation.

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