

Using Echoes of Faith Plus

Teaching Children to Pray

By Jo Rotunno

Teaching others to pray is one of the six tasks of catechesis described by the *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC, 20)*. As your catechists launch another year of leading children, youth, and adults to a deeper life in Christ, you naturally are concerned with their ability to lead prayer well in their catechetical settings. *Echoes of Faith Plus* was designed to assist them your catechists in a number of ways. Let's focus on three key ways in which children can deepen their lives of prayer and see how *Echoes* can help.

Children learn through inculturation. As the *National Directory* teaches, "Catechesis for prayer begins when children see and hear others praying and when they pray with others, especially in the family." Parish catechetical leaders need to give serious attention to a family catechesis through which parents can enrich their own prayer lives and learn simple skills for leading prayer within the home. Since catechists need similar opportunities, busy parish leaders might consider using the Prayer and Spirituality module of *Echoes Plus* in a joint setting where catechists and parents can both be enriched and where they can discuss their mutual concerns about assisting children in this critical area of their faith formation. If you are the one who will be facilitating the *Echoes* module with your catechists, be sure not to overlook the ritual prayer experience that concludes each module. Just as children learn through inculturation into the church's ritual life, so too will your catechists.

In addition to the video reflections, you'll find a number of useful articles and ideas in the companion booklet. Dr. Tom Groome prepared an excellent article, "Prayer: The Way of Love" in which he includes a number of practical ideas for incorporating prayer into daily life. The two bonus interviews with Fr. Lou Cameli and Fr. Ron Rolheiser are additional opportunities for adult formation.

Children learn by doing. The original *Echoes of Faith* was certainly concerned with the forming of children for a life of prayer. The series contains a number of helpful examples of catechists setting up prayer centers and leading children in classroom prayer. I think especially of the modeling in the Getting Started module. *Echoes Plus*, however, has a number of additional helpful features.

We wanted to emphasize to a greater extent the importance of inviting children to participate in effectively-led ritual prayer in their catechetical settings, so we added a fourth video segment to the four grade-level Methodology videos. This new segment teaches catechists simple ritual prayer forms that are easy to incorporate and don't take excessive time in their already jam-packed catechetical sessions. The video both models

and explains to them the importance of creating an environment and structure for classroom prayer that is achievable and that can be executed with confidence by most catechists.

Children like answers to their “Why?” questions. Young people will often tell their catechists that Mass on Sunday, which for us is the core of our sacramental life, is boring and uninteresting to them. They don’t get the point of all the ritual and, sometimes, can’t see what is going on. This can be due to a number of reasons—the poor quality of the liturgy in progress, a feeling of exclusion, poor modeling from neighboring members of the assembly, or a lack of understanding of what the ritual means.

Your catechists have a number of background tools on liturgy and sacraments available to them, starting with their catechist guides. Publishers expend a lot of time and money in giving catechists a wealth of background material to support their teaching. *Echoes* offers them formation to accompany the facts. Catechists who use the Liturgy and Sacraments module will gain good basic knowledge about the nature of liturgy and ritual, the meaning of sacrament and the presence of the risen Christ within them, and some beginning understandings of the church’s sacramental practice. But they will also have the opportunity to connect their new knowledge with their own lives and to reflect on the importance of sacramental living. The bonus interviews with Sr. Kate Dooley reflecting on her lifetime of teaching this subject to both children and adults and the interview with Fr. Larry Mick on the RCIA will continue to enrich your catechists in additional ways.

Prayer in all its forms and participation in the ritual prayer of the church are critical to faith formation. I hope you’ll take advantage of some of the suggestions offered here to help the children, youth, and adults in your catechetical programs to prayer together often and well.

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