



Getting Started as a Catechist

“The catechist is a Christian who receives a particular calling from God that, when accepted in faith, empowers him for the service of the transmission of faith and for the task of initiating others into the Christian life...Through this calling, the catechist is made a participant in Jesus’ mission of introducing disciples into his filial relationship with the Father.” (Directory for Catechesis §112)

Congratulations on your decision to answer God’s ministerial calling in your life. That’s right, you have now entered into “The Ministry of the Catechist.” In 2021, Pope Francis wrote the apostolic letter, *Antiquum Ministerium* (**English, Spanish**), in which he formally institutes the ministry of the catechist in the Church. In this ministry, you will play a crucial role in the life of the Church and in her evangelizing mission.

Getting started as a catechist, however, can be a bit overwhelming. So, here we offer a few ideas to help you participate in the ministry of catechist with confidence and the assurance that the Holy Spirit is always with you, and will work in and through you as you share the Gospel message with those you instruct and accompany in faith.

The Ministry of the Catechist

- 1. First things first—PRAY!** Your calling as a catechist is grounded in your relationship with God, which you continue to nourish through prayer. The following resources will help you to spend some time in prayer reflecting on your role as you are called into the important ministry of the catechist:
 - a. This *Holy Hour for Catechists* booklet (**English, Spanish**) will help you to prayerfully consider your role in this important ministry.
 - b. These *3–Minute Retreats from Loyola Press* (**English, Spanish**) will help you to make a habit of simple, daily prayer when you’re busy.

2. **Be aware of the importance of your identity and vocation as a catechist.** You are called not only to teach the faith, but to be a witness of the faith—a keeper of the memory of God. You are also called to accompany others into the mystery of God's love and into relationship with Jesus Christ. Being a catechist involves much more than instruction—your role involves inspiring others! Learn more about *The Identity and Vocation of the Catechist* ([English](#), [Spanish](#)).
3. **Along these same lines, the tasks of catechesis are varied.** You will be leading people to knowledge of the faith, initiating them into the celebration of the mystery, forming children for life in Christ, teaching and leading prayer and introducing children and families to the life of your parish community. Learn more about *The Tasks of Catechesis* ([English](#), [Spanish](#)).
4. **Remember—the faith is caught more than it is taught!** By your joyful example of striving for holiness in everyday life, those you lead and accompany will see you as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, and they will be more attracted to embarking on the journey of faith alongside you. Learn more about *The Catechist as a Disciple of Christ* ([English](#), [Spanish](#)).
5. **For more information on these and more aspects of catechetical ministry**, you're encouraged to read the *Catechist's Guide to the Directory for Catechesis* ([English](#), [Spanish](#)), and for an in-depth look at the process of catechesis under the primacy of evangelization, you can turn to the new *Directory for Catechesis* ([English](#), [Spanish](#)).

Practical Suggestions

- **Archdiocesan requirements (Background check and VIRTUS training).** Your catechetical leader will have information for you about the requirements for all volunteers in the archdiocese who work with children. You can learn more about the Safe Environment and Compliances of the Archdiocese of Chicago by viewing [this webinar](#) (available in English only).
- **The Archdiocese of Chicago through the Office of Lifelong Formation provides ongoing formation for catechists.** This will help you to grow in your faith and to develop skills as a catechist. Be sure to ask your catechetical leader about this!
- **Plan and prepare for your lessons.** Be sure to rely on the leader's guide and online tools of the religion textbook series that your parish is using. These guides often include a variety of lesson planning tips and classroom strategies.
- **Create a sacred space in the room.** No matter where you are meeting, it will help children to enter into prayerful reflection when you setup a sacred space in a prominent location in the room.
- **Welcome children by name as they enter the room.** This will help them to feel welcome and comfortable in your class. They will see you as someone who cares about them and wants to accompany them along their faith journey.
- **Set some ground rules for your classroom.** It's important for children to understand what is hoped for and expected of them during your faith formation sessions. By setting clear rules during the first week(s) of class, you will help to decrease incidences of poor behavior. You may want to search online for examples of “positive classroom rules” or check with your catechetical leader for suggestions.

- **Modeling how to pray is important.** Don't just lead children in prayer, teach them how to pray by modeling different forms of prayer each time you gather. As you model how to pray during the beginning of your sessions, students will become more familiar with how to pray and will begin to feel comfortable leading prayer in your classroom.
- **Use a variety of methods and activities when teaching.** Children learn in different ways, so pay attention during your faith formation sessions as you use a variety of methods and see what the children respond to best. Again, your textbook series will provide a lot of options for you to choose from for each lesson. These can include visual aids, creative/artistic work, physical activities/movement, reading, writing and auditory resources such as music.
- **Communicate with parents regularly.** This is so critically important! Our role as catechists is to support the parents' call to be the first catechists and first evangelizers for their children. They need to be included in their child's faith formation experience. Be sure to check with your catechetical leader on suggested and permitted methods for communicating with parents.
- **If you need more help, contact Deborah Breakey** (Senior Coordinator of Children and Family Ministry), or **MaryEllen Casselman** (Coordinator of Children and Family Ministry). In the Office of Lifelong Formation, we are available to offer support and guidance to catechetical leaders and catechists in the archdiocese.

Helpful Resources

- The booklet, **Celebrating "The Ministry Of The Catechist,"** written by Janet Schaeffler, OP, will help catechists reflect on Pope Francis' apostolic letter *Antiquum Ministerium*, so that it might enrich and strengthen your catechetical ministry (available in English only).
- In 2013, Pope Francis addressed participants in the pilgrimage of catechists during the International Congress of Catechesis in Rome. During this address, Pope Francis spoke about catechesis as a vocation and that being a catechist means witnessing to the faith. He also inspires catechists to *"Always start anew from Christ!"* (**English, Spanish**).
- *The Catechists Toolbox Series* will equip you for catechetical ministry with easy-to-understand guides and the wisdom and experience of Joe Paprocki and Julianne Stanz are sure to help both practically and spiritually (**English, Spanish**).
- The **Being a Catechist Archives** of the Catechist's Journey blog has many resources which will equip and inspire catechists for faith formation ministry (available in English only).
- **An Evangelizing Catechesis: Teaching from Your Encounter with Christ** shows you how every form of catechesis must be evangelistic in nature, fully centered on Christ and designed to draw students into a life of missionary discipleship (available in English only).
- **The New Directory for Catechesis: Highlights and Summaries for Catechists and Pastoral Leaders** presents a user-friendly overview of the new *Directory for Catechesis*. This easy-to-read guide makes the Directory accessible, relevant and meaningful to those in catechetical ministry (available in English only).

- These Archdiocese of Chicago certification webinars will help you to acquire and develop skills for your catechetical ministry.
 - **Called to Holiness**
 - **Key Elements of an Intentional Space for Encounter**

A Prayer for Catechists

Loving God, Creator of all things, you call us to be in relationship with you and others. Thank you for calling me to be a catechist, for the opportunity to share with others what you have given to me.

May all those with whom I share the gift of faith discover how you are present in all things. May they come to know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

May the grace of the Holy Spirit guide my heart and lips, so that I may remain constant in loving and praising you. May I be a witness to the Gospel and a minister of your truth. May all my words and actions reflect your love. Amen.