

## **The Six Tasks of Catechesis #5: Education for Community Life, or Mentoring our Faith**

The fifth of the Six Tasks of Catechesis is education for community life, or in terms of the remembering phrase HELP ME, mentoring our faith. In other words, this task prepares the Christian to live in community and participate actively in the life and mission of the Church. Read how our bishops challenge us to carry this out:

*Catechesis encourages an apprenticeship in Christian living that is based on Christ's teachings about community life. It should encourage a spirit of simplicity and humility, a special concern for the poor, particular care for the alienated, a sense of fraternal correction, common prayer, mutual forgiveness and a fraternal love that embraces all these attitudes (NDC 20).*

They go on to remind us that all have gifts for building up the Church, and we should prepare all to affirm “their Catholic identity while respecting the faith of others.” Education for community life calls us to prepare our students to take the love they have received from God and share it within the community and to take on the attitudes of Jesus.

This calls upon us to have an attitude of service, a spirit of simplicity and humility, and concern for the poor and alienated. We are called to correct gently, pray, model forgiveness, and welcome and show love to others. For many we are the first image of Christ they encounter when they brave their way to the church. That is an awesome responsibility. Do we greet them as Jesus greeted the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3–11), or the centurion whose servant was ill (Luke 7:1–10), or are we more like the disciples who urged Jesus to send away the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21–28)?

Mentoring our faith also challenges us to look for ways to connect students to parish life and ministries. A third aspect of this task calls for ecumenical awareness. Having a basic knowledge of other Christian traditions is important for catechetical leaders. Many of our families will have a relative from a different tradition, and our teens will have friends from a variety of traditions. Knowing how to explain both our similarities and differences clearly and respectfully is important.

### **How Do We Educate for Community Life?**

Classrooms should be models of Christian behavior, places where Christian attitudes and behaviors are expected and correction is done in a fraternal way. A well-disciplined classroom allows the students to blossom and grow in faith. That final step in the lesson, the “so what,” in which we send the students out to live what they have learned, is the

basic way of doing this, but there is so much more. We are called to an apprenticeship and building up of the Church. We need to connect the catechetical programs to the rest of the life and ministries of the parish. Here are some examples of how we can integrate faith formation classes into parish life and create that mentoring apprenticeship.

- Mission trips are always transforming experiences for teens, whether one day, weekend, or weeklong camps.
- Confirmation service hours are commonly part of sacramental preparation. Look at ways these can connect to ongoing parish ministries so that the young people can continue serving after they complete their required hours. We have teens help as aides with the younger grades, serve as lectors and ushers and choir members at weekend Masses, and work with our women's group on Saturdays at the nursing home.
- Use the times when sponsors and candidates for Confirmation meet to encourage faith mentoring.
- Mission drives teach care for those in need and the universality of our Church in a tangible way that children can understand.
- Get parish ministries involved in the program. For instance, our Rosary Guild comes in after the third graders learn about the prayer, and they make rosaries with the children. The Knights of Columbus and Catholic Daughters have helped with various programs for the youth. We partner with the sick and homebound ministry to create prayer partners for the classes, which also teaches our youth to pray and care for those in need.

What are ways you connect your program with the rest of the parish? How do you encourage education for community life?

—

*Bill Smith has served as a catechetical leader for 40 years in a variety of parish settings, mostly within the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Bill received his Master's in Religious Studies from the University of the Incarnate Word. He has served on a variety of archdiocesan catechetical committees and is an instructor for the archdiocesan catechist formation program.*