

The Six Tasks of Catechesis #6: Missionary Initiation, or Evangelizing our Faith

The last of the Six Tasks of Catechesis is missionary initiation, or in terms of the remembering phrase HELP ME, evangelizing our faith. Here's how our bishops explain this task:

“The ‘world’ thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation. Catechesis seeks to help the disciples of Christ to be present in society precisely as believing Christians who are able and willing to bear witness to their faith in words and deeds” (NDC 20). They go on to list the evangelical attitudes of Jesus that we need to foster: being poor in spirit, compassionate, and meek; hearing the cry of injustice; being merciful, pure of heart, and peacemakers; and accepting of rejection. If we have come to that intimacy with Christ to which we are called, how can we not feel compelled to share him with others? Evangelizing our faith is the task that helps us with that sharing.”

There is a wonderful short booklet, *Evangelization in the Parish Catechetical Program* (NCCL), that takes the three goals of evangelization from *Go and Make Disciples*—to live our faith fully, to share our faith with others, and to transform the world in Christ—and looks at their implications and possibilities in a catechetical program. It asks some very pointed questions of us as catechetical leaders and then gives some food for thought on the topics.

- How do we respond to those folks who come in at the “wrong” time of the year and with a list of messy needs? Do we respond by welcoming them in or reminding them when they “should” have come?
- Are the sacramental preparation sessions for parents informational and instructional sessions, or do they include formation and transformation opportunities as well?
- Do we get referrals from satisfied customers? How often does the phone ring or someone come in and begin with, “We were talking at work yesterday and my friend told me to call because...” If not, why not?
- Do our catechists ever say, “I sure learned a lot this year”?
- Do we see RCIA graduates actively involved in parish ministry and sharing their gifts?
- How do we welcome those from a different culture or who speak a different language? Is there someone available to talk with them?
- How do we welcome those with special needs?

- What do people in the community say about the parish?

How Do We Promote Missionary Initiation in the Classroom?

One place to start is with the catechist manuals and student books. The manuals will show the Catholic social teaching dimension of each lesson. Often there are optional ideas of how this can be developed more fully and go beyond the classroom walls. Often we think missionary spirit means going somewhere else in the world, but it begins right in our own parishes. A lesson on creation might give ideas on how the students could show care for the earth. When teaching care for those in need, there might be a card-writing activity or a collection idea. Each month our junior high youth have a different ministry that they support, such as collecting canned goods for the food pantry or diapers and other baby items for our crisis pregnancy group.

To expose teens or adults to the bigger picture, consider mission trips. There is nothing that matches the transforming power of these trips. Before the trip, everyone is excited and nervous about what they are going to do FOR the group they are going to serve. When they come back the talk is about how much they have learned, grown, and been touched BY the groups they encountered. Evangelization changes us as much as those we go out to reach. For parishes new to mission trips, talk to the diocesan office for ideas to get started. They can provide contacts within the diocese for day trips. Other groups host camps throughout the country that bring youth from various parishes together and create a weeklong program that helps the group process their experiences. Many missionary organizations offer both educational programs and ways to support their efforts to preach the Good News to all nations.

The creativity of the catechetical team and the other ministries of the parish can take the lessons of evangelization to another level. How do you encourage a missionary spirit and evangelization in your parish?

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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 Masters 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.