

The Structure of a Class

This is a short resource designed to give you some ideas and a helpful framework for how to organize a class. You will undoubtedly find as the year(s) progress that you develop your own rhythm and style, and you can make adjustments to what you see here so that it fits you as a person and as a catechist.

It is important to remember that being a catechist is more than being a teacher. Catechists certainly instruct children in the faith, but they also serve to share witness to their own faith and to model that faith in action. When planning a class it's a good idea to remember that we are not just teaching content knowledge to our students but also helping to foster in them a personal relationship with God.

From my experience, the one piece of advice that is critical is the need to plan. No matter how much you think you know about a topic, you will still need to outline what you will share and how you will share it. Planning times will vary by experience level and content, but a good rule to follow is to allow yourself at least as much time planning as you will spend teaching. Within your class period, there are many different ways to approach getting information and faith sharing across to students regardless of age. Feel free to be creative (if that requires supplies or a different space, don't be discouraged – just let us know!). If it is helpful, here is a format to follow:

- Start with an opening ritual: Although we do a prayer service with the whole group, your own class opening ritual may have a short prayer component, taking attendance, having students share something new/or good that happened the previous week, etc.
- Present the lesson material. Again, feel free to be creative!
- Do an activity to bring the material of faith to life and life to faith; try to do different activities that might be of interest to your different learners, sometime s a craft, other times have students act out a part of the lesson, use stories, current events, movies, etc.
- Wrap-up – tie together with the students the different things that were done to illustrate the lesson.
- Close with a prayer, one idea is to have each child offer a prayer then close with a prayer that everyone knows such as the Hail Mary, Our Father, etc.)

I have always found it to be helpful to have on hand extra activities or worksheets that although I may not get to, I can use if an activity I had planned “flops” (it only takes the kids half as much time as I expected it to, the tv/vcr/dvd won't work, etc.) or as a transitional activity if some students are finished before others.

The more planned I am, the better the lesson goes. Have ideas of what you will say, what you will pray, and what questions you will ask. Have an idea of how much time you will spend on each part of your lesson so that you plan enough material for the entire class period but not so much that you get bogged down during every class.

If you find yourself in need of resources, please feel free to consult the Religious Education staff. We have materials and experience that can help you to structure a lesson, add activities into a lesson, or provide background material as needed. We do not expect you to be an expert on every topic you are expected to cover – we expect you to be able to model your faith and share it with others. We can help with the content part, don't be afraid to ask.

We will make every effort to let you know when students in your class have learning issues or disabilities. If you need help understanding or addressing those needs, please feel free to contact us, we are happy to discuss issues as they arise.

Inevitably in classroom situations there are discipline issues which arise. If you feel that your class is suffering because of the behavior of a student, please address it with us and we will work with you to help in every way that we can. Often talking to a student in a non-threatening way removed from the situation (in another part of the room or out in the hall) helps to curb the disruption, if this is not the case, feel free to send the student to sit with a member of the Religious Education staff who will be available on the 2nd floor.

Lastly, thank you. I hope that being a catechist grows to be a significant joy in your life. Know that we have been where you are and are ready to help and support you as you need. Be in touch!