

## A Catechist's Vocation-Discernment Checklist

Serving as a catechist is a vocation, and vocations require discernment. Take some time to reflect on the following checklist to discern your own call to serve as a catechist.

I possess or am capable of developing . . .

- a desire to grow in and share faith
- an awareness of God's grace and the desire to respond to that grace
- a commitment to the church's liturgical and sacramental life and moral teachings
- a strength of character built on patience, responsibility, confidence, and creativity
- a generosity of spirit, a respect for diversity, and a habit of hospitality and inclusion
- a basic understanding of Catholic teaching, Scripture, and Catholic Tradition
- honest and caring relationships with young people (and their families)
- effective teaching techniques and strategies
- a love of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and of Christ's Church, our Holy Father, and God's holy people
- a coherence and authenticity of life that are characterized by consistent practice of the faith in a spirit of faith, charity, hope, courage, and joy
- a dedication to personal prayer and to the evangelizing mission of the Church
- a missionary zeal by which I am fully convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith and desire to enthusiastically proclaim it
- an active participation in my local parish community, especially by attendance at Sunday Eucharist
- a devotion to Mary, the first disciple and the model of catechists, and to the Most Holy Eucharist, the source of nourishment for catechists

Which areas do you feel you possess most strongly? Which areas do you need God's grace to grow in?

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## A Catechist's Role Description

As you develop a role description for your catechists, it is recommended that it consist of three simple parts. First, a few basic *qualities* that show you are looking for a well-rounded person with a healthy faith. Second, a few basic *skills* that show you are looking for people capable of handling/growing into the task. Third, some *specifics* about what will be required at your local level (i.e., how many sessions, how many catechist meetings, required formation, Virtus training, etc.). Again, don't overwhelm people, but by the same token, show that there *are* expectations. Here's a sample role description you can feel free to use/adapt.

### Qualities:

- a desire to grow in and share the Catholic faith
- an awareness of God's grace and the desire to respond to that grace
- a commitment to the Church's liturgical and sacramental life and moral teachings
- a strength of character built on patience, responsibility, confidence, and creativity
- a generosity of spirit, respect for diversity, and a habit of hospitality and inclusion
- other \_\_\_\_\_

### Knowledge and Skills:

- a basic understanding of Catholic teaching, Scripture, and Catholic Tradition
- honest and caring relationships with the age group being served
- effective teaching techniques and strategies
- other \_\_\_\_\_

### Responsibilities

- complete initial training/formation: \_\_\_\_\_
- complete safe-environment training: \_\_\_\_\_
- commit to teaching \_\_\_\_\_ sessions of the following grade/level: \_\_\_\_\_
- attend catechist meetings: \_\_\_\_\_
- commit to ongoing formation: \_\_\_\_\_
- other \_\_\_\_\_

## Diving into the Pool of Potential Catechists

Rather than just throw out a net to see what you catch, it is much wiser to identify some target audiences or pools of potential candidates that you can invite to consider serving as catechists. Work with other members of the pastoral staff to identify potential catechists from the following “pools.”

Pools of Potential Catechists	Names of Potential Catechists
parents of children enrolled in the faith-formation program	
catechist aides	
retired parishioners	
RCIA neophytes	
parishioners actively engaged in adult faith formation	
parishioners participating in lay-ministry formation programs	
members of the parish pastoral council	
professional teachers (public school and Catholic school)	
former catechists	
referrals from the pastoral staff	
recommendations from current catechists	
other	

## Top-Ten List for a Catechist's Way of Proceeding

While catechists require a deepening knowledge of the Catholic faith, they will also need your guidance to form a praxis, or as the Jesuits are fond of saying, “a way of proceeding.” Theology that is not rooted in sound and effective praxis will remain sterile. Here are some suggestions for helping catechists approach their ministry with *savoir-faire*—or a way of proceeding that is truly effective.

1. Pray for each student and his/her family.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit for divine assistance. The Spirit never abandons us!
3. Be patient and merciful. Smile just because.
4. Remember that your attitude and behavior communicate more to others than the content of any lesson.
5. Communicate regularly with parents, striving to assist them with strengthening the domestic church.
6. Actively participate in the catechist formation and training programs offered by your diocese.
7. Before starting lesson planning, discuss the parish calendar with the catechetical leader. Holy days, special feast days, and traditional parish celebrations are a vital part of parish life and should be connected to a lesson when appropriate.
8. Carefully study the student text and catechist guide. Plan lessons as a unit (several cohesive lessons taught sequentially over several weeks).
9. Be a scholar: when the catechist guide cites sacred Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, or a papal document, read the fuller text contained in the primary source (most are available online). The wider context is always fascinating!
10. And above all, know that God, who has called you to this ministry, loves you beyond all measure. Rejoice in his love.

Add your own statements that can guide your “way of proceeding” as a catechist:

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## More Than a Guadalupe Celebration or a Dr. King Service

Inculturation means more than offering an occasional “nod” to a particular ethnic group. Rather, it is the ongoing attempt to ensure that the word of God is “taking flesh” in the lives of all those who are involved in faith formation, speaking not only to their ethnicity but also to their socioeconomic status, age, gender, profession, and so on. Take some time to identify the various groupings that make up your faith-formation target audience. Then identify their unique characteristics, gifts, needs, and challenges, as well as some thoughts about how to effectively inculturate the gospel for them.

Target Audiences for Faith Formation	Unique Characteristics, Gifts, Needs, and Challenges	Strategies for Effective Inculturation with This Group

## Summary Form for Ongoing Formation Experiences

As catechists participate in ongoing formation, consider inviting them to complete a Summary Form such as the one below.

Catechist Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Formation Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Presenter/Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

Formation Experience Sponsored/Offered by: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of Formation Experience: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Formation Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary of Learning Experience

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Describe the main focus of the formation experience (two or three sentences).

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Identify three to five key insights from the formation experience.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize what implications these insights will have on your catechetical ministry (three to five sentences).

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## Catechist Evaluation Form

A Self-Evaluation Based on Seven Critical Tools from *The Catechist's Toolbox*

### Part 1

Take this opportunity to evaluate yourself as a catechist over the course of this past year. For each question, choose which “catechist” you are most like with regards to the stated quality/skill:

- a. Like-a-Pro Larry/Louise (I strongly agree.)
- b. Steady-as-She-Goes Steve/Stella (I agree.)
- c. Just-Your-Average Joe/Joanne (I’m in the middle.)
- d. Needs-a-Little-Work Norbert/Nancy (I disagree.)
- e. Back-to-Square-One Bill/Bonnie (I strongly disagree.)

Catechist Tool (Quality or Skill)	Self-Evaluation
1. Over the course of this year, I have engaged in efforts to deepen my own knowledge of the faith and grow spiritually (i.e., attended/participated in workshops, seminars, courses, retreats, and/or dedicated time to reading/reflecting/studying Catholic literature).	a b c d e
2. When it came to preparing and planning for my lessons, I did so thoroughly, thoughtfully, and prayerfully and with an eye toward achieving specific goals/objectives.	a b c d e
3. With regards to my learning environment, I made every effort to arrange it/prepare it in such a way as to make it more conducive to faith formation and prayer.	a b c d e
4. My lessons always included a variety of engaging activities that enabled my learners to be active, not passive, and that allowed us to use the textbook as a resource, not the only resource.	a b c d e
5. I set the tone and maintained a strong but fair sense of discipline with my group that resulted in a high level of cooperation and mutual respect.	a b c d e
6. I regularly included prayer experiences (both liturgical and reflective) that enabled my participants to reflect on and grow in their relationship with the Lord and with the Church.	a b c d e
7. I communicated a sense of teaching with authority and enthusiasm by paying attention to my technique: moving around, making eye contact, varying my voice, using facial expression and body language, keeping a sense of humor, and showing appropriate emotion.	a b c d e

### Part 2

- Which three tools are you strongest in?  


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- Reflect on these strengths: Where/from whom did you learn these skills/qualities? What did you do to improve in these areas in the past year? What can/will you do to maintain this level of effectiveness or even improve?  


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- Which tool do you feel needs the most improvement in the coming year?  


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- Reflect on this area of improvement: What can/will you do to develop this skill/quality? How can you use your strengths to overcome this area of weakness?  


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## Tips for Handling Conflict

Despite your best efforts as a catechetical leader, conflicts will arise and will need to be dealt with. It's part of the human condition. While we strive to avoid conflicts, it is important to also know how to deal with them when they surface. Here are some tips for handling conflict, along with space for you to add your own thoughts.

Tips for Handling Conflict	My Thoughts
<p><b>1.</b> Choose your battles wisely—Not every conflict needs to be resolved immediately. Some have a way of working themselves out on their own. Be patient.</p>	
<p><b>2.</b> Diagnose the conflict—Clarify the source and nature of the conflict to be sure that you are addressing the real issue.</p>	
<p><b>3.</b> Timing is everything—Be sure to confront the conflict at an appropriate time and in an appropriate place in order to avoid a public scene.</p>	
<p><b>4.</b> Look in the mirror—Do an honest self-assessment to determine what role you are playing in causing this conflict.</p>	
<p><b>5.</b> Put yourself in his or her shoes—It can be helpful to look at the conflict from the other person's point of view.</p>	
<p><b>6.</b> Strive for win-win—Don't focus on defeating the other person but rather on seeking reconciliation.</p>	
<p><b>7.</b> Be politely direct—Get to the heart of the matter. The anxiety about confronting a conflict is often worse than actually confronting it.</p>	
<p><b>8.</b> Keep a laser focus—Don't allow yourself to be swept away by anger. Work the problem, and don't be drawn into tangents or personal attacks.</p>	
<p><b>9.</b> Don't let molehills become mountains—While you want to choose your battles wisely, sometimes it is helpful to nip a conflict in the bud before it grows unmanageable.</p>	
<p><b>10.</b> Be forgiving—Conflict resolution can often bring people closer together. Pray for the grace you need to forgive any wrongs you've endured and move on.</p>	



## A Checklist for Expressing Thanks

When it comes to retaining catechists, those who stay are the ones who feel they have made a significant difference. As a catechetical leader, one of your responsibilities is to affirm catechists so that they know they and their gifts are appreciated. Here are some suggestions for expressing thanks to your catechists.

1. Offer a face-to-face thank-you whenever you interact with catechists.
2. Send individual notes or e-mails to catechists, thanking them for sharing their gifts.
3. Compliment catechists on a job well done.
4. Include thank-yous and affirmations in your newsletter, Facebook page, and website.
5. Offer catechists a small gift or a meal to show your gratitude.
6. Publicly acknowledge achievements by catechists.
7. Feature profiles of catechists in the parish bulletin, newsletter, and website.
8. Present awards/certificates and/or acknowledge milestones for catechists.
9. Take pictures of catechists in action, and post them on a bulletin board and social media.
10. Ask catechists for their input and wisdom as a way of affirming their gifts.

Which of the above strategies work best for you, and why?

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What other ways can you think of to affirm and thank your catechists?

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## Seven Characteristics of a Nurturing Catechetical Community

Reflect upon the following seven characteristics of a nurturing community. In what ways do you live out these characteristics of a nurturing community?

Characteristic	I exhibit this characteristic when I . . .
<p><b>Mission</b>—I am grounded in our Roman Catholic faith and pray often with my colleagues so as to support each other in our mission.</p>	
<p><b>Joy</b>—A spirit of joy is evident in my interactions.</p>	
<p><b>Parameters</b>—I have a clear understanding of responsibilities and behavior expectations both for myself and for those in positions of leadership.</p>	
<p><b>Empowerment</b>—I pursue training and ongoing formation opportunities. I am grounded in prayer and participate frequently in the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist so as to attune my heart to Christ.</p>	
<p><b>Recognition</b>—I receive recognition in many forms, such as commissioning, public recognition, verbal thanks, special gatherings, a ministry badge, etc.</p>	
<p><b>Engagement</b>—I participate in parish-wide events and share the light of faith with the greater community through personal and professional networks, political involvement, etc.</p>	
<p><b>Stewardship</b>—I embrace catechesis as a way of life and seek ways to make a difference by connecting faith and life in contemporary culture.</p>	