Looking forward to the events and celebrations of faith that you will experience in the company of these children.

Once again, I thank you for your ministry and wish to encourage your own pursuit of an ever-deepening understanding of our faith through prayer, study and reflection. These will enrich your own spiritual life so that you may “give an account of the hope that is within you” (1 Peter 2:11). Remember that many opportunities are offered through the courses and workshops of Institute for Pastoral Ministry. I hope that you will take full advantage of these opportunities. And, if you have not completed your catechetical certification, I strongly encourage you toward that goal.

Thank you for the witness of your lives, your ministry in catechesis and education, and for all that you do for so many in building up the Body of Christ. Come Lord Jesus! I look forward to meeting many of your personally this coming year in our parishes, missions and gatherings of Faith and family!

Gratefully yours in the Lord,

Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann,
J.C.D., D.D.
Bishop of Orange

“Stay where you are. Find your own Calcutta. Find the sick, the suffering, and the lonely right there where you are — in your own homes and in your own families, in your workplaces and in your schools. You can find Calcutta all over the world, if you have the eyes to see. Everywhere, wherever you go, you find people who are unwanted, unloved, uncared for, just rejected by society — completely forgotten, completely left alone.”

-St. Teresa of Calcutta

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

With the start of a new school year, we begin again to share the Good News of Jesus with the children and families in our programs. Sharing of the Good News is the mission of the catechist, the mission of each one of us, the mission of the church! As Pope Francis said in Evangelii Gaudium,

“On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.” (EG 164)

These words of our Holy Father certainly echo as well the teaching and reflections of the Petrine ministry in the last century and into the present day, thinking of Blessed Pope Paul VI, Saint John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI in their writings!

The work of a catechist is to give witness, to provide testimony, not only with your words but by the example of your lives! Often, that is what is remembered, if we think of those who inspired us in the Faith! I am very grateful for the impact of your ministry and your witness to the love of Christ. Your work assists these children in growing and strengthening their own relationship with Christ and His Church. You are sowers of the seeds of faith, which will bear fruit in due season.

Your witness is, in fact, a work of evangelization. The very reason that Christ established the Church — His living Body here on earth — FOR THIS WORK — for evangelization. We recall the words of the Lord to St. Peter and the Apostles in St. Matthew’s Gospel, and the words of the Lord as well to the Apostles on the Mount of Olives: “Go and make Disciples of all nations.” The ministry and work of evangelization at the same time is profoundly a work of ecclesial communion!

As you prepare for the coming year of catechetical ministry, (which in fact is already here!) I hope you have a strong sense of anticipation and excitement! This time of the year, with its “newness” and anticipation is a gift in itself as we see our students, teachers and families once again on a regular basis. It is a great gift to see the light of faith in the eyes of a child. I hope that you are looking forward to the events and celebrations of faith that you will experience in the company of these children. Once again, I thank you for your ministry and wish to encourage your own pursuit of an ever-deepening understanding of our faith through prayer, study and reflection. These will enrich your own spiritual life so that you may “give an account of the hope that is within you” (1 Peter 2:11). Remember that many opportunities are offered through the courses and workshops of Institute for Pastoral Ministry. I hope that you will take full advantage of these opportunities. And, if you have not completed your catechetical certification, I strongly encourage you toward that goal.

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Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann,
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Friends, Not Statues: Three Ways to Teach About the Saints

There are many ways we can teach about the saints. We can ask young people to write a report about their favorite saints. We can have the class choose a patron saint. We can include facts about saints in our weekly lessons.

But when I think about the way I talk about my friends, I don’t talk about them as if they were a collection of facts from a Wikipedia page.

I don’t say what day their birthday falls on or when they were married; rather, I tell stories about them. I talk about adventures we’ve had together, or I share insights I’ve received from the deep conversations we’ve had.

I propose we do the same thing when we talk about the saints with the young people in our faith formation classes. Instead of teaching them about the saints, we should share the story of our life with the saints. Here are three ways to do that:

1. Share an anecdote
   What anecdote about a saint do you find most compelling or interesting? Share that anecdote with the young people in your class. Young people respond to our favorite anecdotes because whenever we share a story with someone, we make that person a part of that story too. Tie the anecdote into the classroom discussion, if possible. For example, I love the story of St. Ignatius Loyola letting a donkey decide whether or not he would kill someone who he thought had blasphemed against the Blessed Virgin Mary. I often use this story when we talk about forming consciences to make good decisions.

2. Share the wisdom
   We look to the saints because they teach us what it means to live as disciples of Christ. They give us a model to follow. A simple way to share their wisdom is to share your favorite quote from your favorite saint. One of my favorites is attributed to St. Ignatius: “Pray as if everything depends on God; work as if everything depends on you.” These quotes often make a saint’s wisdom manageable for young people. Moreover, these quotes can serve as a spiritual compass for young people throughout their lives.

3. Share a prayer
   Instead of praying to the saints, we should pray with them. For example, I begin every faith formation class by praying the Daily Examen. I explain to the young people the purpose and history of the prayer. This practice not only centers them and calms them down before class (which is beneficial in and of itself); it also gives an example of how the young people can imitate the saints by praying like them. It’s like passing down a family heirloom.

The Communion of Saints is a living one. The saints are not just historical figures who lived in some distant past or people who pray for us in heaven. The saints are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and they are present with us. By sharing their stories, their wisdom, and their prayers, we show the young people in our classes that the saints are our friends, not statues.

What is a story about your favorite saint? How might you share it with the young people in your faith formation group?

-Bob Burnham

http://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/
LIFE BUILDING

We’ve heard it a thousand, million times. Jesus told us to build our house on rock, and he is the rock, the foundation. When we think about the life of faith, about the ministry of catechesis, of faith formation, we can think of our work as that of a contractor, building a house. And we begin with Jesus, He is our foundation stone, our rock.

The ministry of catechesis is first of all about introducing children to the person of Jesus. We do that by telling His Story, introducing them to Scripture and Sacraments, sharing the witness of our own relationship with Jesus, by walking with our students and their families and helping them identify Christ’s presence in their everyday lives.

In every lesson and activity and conversation, we are building faith, proposing the presence of Christ, invisible yet REAL. We are building on the rock, on the solid foundation of Christ.

And this work depends upon the nurturing of our own encounter with Christ. It is by delving into the Scriptures on our own, attending to our own life of prayer and recognizing Him, present in our day to day lives that we are equipped to share Him with others. Our own relationship with Him is what gives life to our witness to children and their families.

This is why the most important thing we can do in our ministry of catechesis is to invest time in our own spiritual development. An annual retreat, a formation class, a new book about prayer - any of these can prime our pump, fill our cup, bring new energy to our task. Let’s build on the rock.

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.”

St. Pope John Paul II Catechesis Tradendae

WAYS TO KEEP THE FAITH

“Let the Little Children Come to Me”
Mt 19:14

“Are we done yet?” my 5yr old asked in a loud, whiny voice. We were at Sunday mass, and I had spent the last hour struggling to get my two boys to settle down. My son’s question would’ve been embarrassing enough had only the people sitting near us overheard. But no, Communion had ended, the priest had just sat down, and the entire congregation was engaged in silent prayer… that is, until my son piped up.

As parents or caregivers, these are moments we dread. The moments when our children’s behavior makes us want to sink down in the pew and disappear. However, we can try to avoid these meltdowns by helping our children engage in the mass. How can we encourage children to be active participants, instead of wanting to bolt as soon as they’ve received the Eucharist? Try some of these ideas with your family… and good luck!

- Daniella Aquino

1. Sit in the very, very front
Families with children tend to flock to the safety and anonymity of the back row, the vestibule or even the crying room. It’s easy to whisk away a fussy child if you are near the exit. But I always remember a priest who refused to build a crying room in his church, because he believed “children are part of the congregation too.” I recently left my comfort zone in the back, and sat in the front row instead. Naturally, sitting near the presider helped my boys sit still, but more importantly, they could see what was going on for the first time. The front and center view of the action gave them a much better understanding of the mass.

2. Bring Toys and books
Not just any toys-Catholic toys! Try a Saint doll, a silicone rosary, or a picture book of the mass. Ask your child to point out the corresponding illustrations during the liturgy. Buy some Catholic flash cards, or get crafty and make your own!

3. Bear the Gifts
Volunteer to be the gift bearers. It’s a beautiful opportunity for your children to be directly involved in the mass.

4. Buy a liturgical calendar
Teach your children about the liturgical seasons. Have them point out the different colors on the altar, or the priest’s vestments. Let them choose their Sunday clothes to match the current liturgical season.

5. Tell the Great Story
Storytelling is an easy way to help children connect to their faith. My oldest son loves the story of our Lord’s Passion. He understands that Jesus suffered and died on the cross, and he always points out the crucifix and the Stations of the Cross. The Last Supper is another favorite, especially since it is retold every week during the mass. Ultimately, there is no better way to engage a child’s imagination than through story-telling, and what better story is there than the Great Story of Our Lord?

Shower of Roses, Aug 24, 2011 http://showerofroses.blogspot.com/
At times we may find it challenging to know how to be prayerful in our daily activities. While it is definitely important that we try to set aside time each day for prayer and silence, it is just as important that all the moments of our lives be filled with prayer. After all, St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17).

While it may not always seem like the most natural time to pray, our daily tasks are the perfect opportunity for us to cultivate prayer. In the midst of activity, this prayer will root us in Christ and be the source of energy, creativity and joy.

Usually when we are doing other activities, long prayers are impractical since they require that we stop and focus only on the prayer. Instead, at times like these we have the chance to become masters of repetitive internal prayer and reap its benefits. Far from being a mindless activity, repetitive interior prayer is actually an anchoring in the present moment that allows us to be receptive to the work of God in our lives.

How to:
Say a short prayer and repeat it in your heart. Observe what happens. It really is this easy. You can try one of the following:

1. The Jesus Prayer: “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me”
3. As inspired by St. Faustina and the Divine Mercy: “Jesus, I trust in you”

When we learn to pray in this way, we find that we really can pray without ceasing. Furthermore, we find that we can pray at any time and in any place: running on the treadmill, taking our kids to school, in a meeting, at the grocery store, at the doctor’s office; even during our conversations. As we continue to be anchored in prayer, we will find that our daily tasks are transformed into ministry and mission.

- Annette Venegas