“Knowing Jesus is the best gift that anyone can ever receive. That we have encountered Him is the best thing that has happened in our lives. Making Him known by our deeds and words is our greatest joy.”

Aparecida Document, CELAM 2007

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

As the summer days have given way to the season of autumn, we begin to shift and focus once again into a more academic and pastoral calendar in our parishes and schools. I know that you have been preparing once again to serve our young brothers and sisters in Christ in the ministry of catechesis. We remember that in readings on the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, we also hear the words of the Lord who says “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them.”

This calling and ministry which you take up is so important and I am very grateful for your generosity, commitment and sacrifice. These children whom you serve, reflect the children in the Gospel the Lord was speaking of and are indeed our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ. By your ministry and the witness of your lives you help to grow and strengthen their relationship with Christ and His Church. Your presence and your witness make a difference in the lives of those you serve, as you plant and water the seeds of faith which will bear fruit in due season.

I encourage you in this ministry and in the pursuit of an ever deepening understanding of our faith through prayer, study and reflection so that you may “give an account of the hope that is within you” (1 Peter 2:11). Many opportunities are offered through the courses and workshops of Institute for Pastoral Ministry and I hope that you will take advantage of them.

The life of the Body of Christ is full and always has many projects, missions and activities – but particularly so this year. We just celebrated the World Meeting of Families in late September to Philadelphia, and I was so blessed to be there with over 1000 folks from our Diocese. These were great days of Faith and family for all, joyfully concluded with the visit of our Holy Father Francis, who especially gave many encouraging words, especially at the Saturday evening “Festival of Families.”

The canonization of Blessed Junipero Serra was celebrated at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception with huge crowds from around the country. The blessings of these days and the visit of Pope Francis will extend for years to come! This is an opportunity to proclaim the “Joy of the Gospel” which is our Holy Father’s frequent theme, and I certainly experienced it being part of the festivities and praying, singing and celebrating with all present. It is also an opportunity to point to another big event in the life of the Church – the upcoming Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy (beginning December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception).

Great days of events and celebrations of Faith, along with the “regular” festivities are now on the horizon, which all proclaim the mysteries of our Faith: All Saints Day, All Souls Day, Christ the King, Advent, Our Lady of Guadalupe and the days that surround her festival, Las Posadas, Simbang Gabi, and the celebration of the festive time of The Nativity of Our Lord!

In that light, let us take a breather and then pray that in the midst of the busy-ness of our lives, that God will reveal His Mercy to us in new ways and that we will be filled with the Joy of the Gospel. May you go forth with this joy to proclaim the love of the Lord in the work that you do! Thank you for the witness of your lives, your ministry in catechesis and education, and for all that you do! Come Lord Jesus!

Gratefully yours in the Lord,

Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann, J.C.D., D.D.
Bishop of Orange
Preparing My Heart and Mind: Four Ways to Get Ready for the Classroom

My three kids are back in school and I’m preparing to head back to the parish classroom as a third-grade catechist. It would be easy for me to overlook preparing for the class since I’ve been teaching the same grade for a few years, but I know that this would be a huge mistake. Just because I am familiar with the age and curriculum doesn’t mean I don’t need to prepare. Preparing to teach religious education isn’t just about reading the curriculum and planning activities—I also need to prepare my heart and mind.

As I return to the classroom, I need to check in with myself and see where I am in my own spiritual formation. Did I take a summer break from my personal faith journey? Do I need to get my brain and heart back in gear so I can help lead my students to Christ? The answer to both questions for me is yes. Like most people, my summer was fun, busy, and a bit crazy. While my family and I attended Mass and celebrated the sacraments during the summer months, I still need to grow in my faith life to be the best catechist I can be for the children.

How will I prepare my heart and mind for the new year? First, I’m taking the time to be still and quiet. All I need is just a few minutes each day to pray and think about why I teach. In that stillness I try to be honest about my strengths and weaknesses in the classroom and my fears about starting another school year. I also envision the smiles on the faces of the children and their excitement as we do a fun activity.

Second, I return to my favorite books about teaching religious education and review a few chapters that I think I’ll need. This year, I will review two chapters in The Catechist’s Toolbox by Joe Paprocki: Chapter 10, “Sandpaper: Smoothing Out Discipline Problems,” and Chapter 9, “Extension Cords: Plugging into the Power of Prayer.” Discipline is my biggest challenge every year, and I absolutely love helping children learn and experience new ways to pray.

Third, I explore new ways to grow in my faith. It is easy to neglect yourself when you are serving others. This year, I’ve selected a new spiritual book to read, and I’ve registered for a weekly Bible study at my parish that is about the Blessed Virgin Mary. Teaching fuels my desire to learn more, and that fuels my passion to teach. Learning and teaching go hand in hand for me.

Finally, I pray for my aides, students, and their families, even though I do not know their names yet.

How do you prepare for the Faith Formation classroom? 


-Lisa Jones
Who does a catechist serve?

We tend to think of the children - but really - we have an opportunity to serve both children and their families. And, in fact, if we include the parents in our ministry we have a lot more impact with them as our partners. This suggests that we need to BUILD a relationship with the parents of our students. Perhaps this has always been so - but more so today than in the past. This can pose a challenge in our attitude and relationship with parents - but there is only one way to relate to the parents of the children in our classrooms - that is as partners.

Three possible ways for becoming partners with parents:

1. **Build a bridge of trust**
   - Some of the parents of your students have a tenuous relationship to God, Jesus and the Church. For some reason they have decided to bring their children to us - but they are not always convinced or committed. Let’s not be surprised at that. Let’s plan for it. Let’s make friends of the parents - and build a bridge of trust.
   - A bridge of trust is built when a person perceives that they are welcome and we are interested in them and their concerns.
   - Some ways to build trust:
     - Make a note of the parent’s names alongside your student’s on the class list. Try to greet parents by name.
     - Notice something positive about their child, make a comment, send a note. Catch their child doing something good - and tell them about it.

2. **Express an Invitation**
   - Invite them into the adventure of faith with their child.
   - Remember that parents often don’t feel equipped to talk about faith with their child. Send some tools their way - a family activity and reflection page, a particular prayer for them to learn together, a scavenger hunt for their visit to the church.

3. **Tell Them A Story - and Point them towards Jesus’ story**
   - Children love stories - and so do their parents!
   - Share your own story of faith with the child - and with the parents. Consider what are one or two instances when God “showed up” for you - and figure out how to talk about that in a quick soundbite.
   - Help them to help their child discover Jesus.

How can you build a partnership with parents in your parish?

### Sharing the Faith

**Visiting with Pope Francis**

Over two hundred representatives from the Diocese of Orange attended events surrounding Pope Francis’ visit to the United States. The Office of Pastoral Care led a contingent of 26 to the **World Meeting of Families 2015 (WMOF)**.

WMOF, which took place September 22-27, 2015 in Philadelphia, was started by Saint Pope John Paul II in 1992 to create a gathering that would examine how the Church could strengthen the sacred bonds of the family unit. The first WMOF took place in Rome in 1994. Since 1994, every three years, families from all over the world have been accepting the Holy Father’s invitation to gather.

The conference provides an opportunity for families to dialogue and pray together. Distinguished speakers present on topics that lead families into discussion groups on the Christian family’s role in the church and society. The presentations are inspiring and challenging. But in addition to the great content of the WMOF - the most inspirational and challenging feature of this year’s meeting was the presence of Pope Francis who drew millions to the closing Mass.

**Pumpkin Krispies Treats**

**Ingredients:**
- 3 T butter
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- Red and yellow food coloring
- 5 1/2 cups mini-marshmallows
- 6 cups crispy rice cereal
- Mini Tootsie rolls

**Directions:**
1. In a large saucepan, melt and slightly brown butter on medium heat.
2. Add vanilla extract and marshmallows. Stir until marshmallows are completely melted.
3. Add food coloring until desired orange color is reached.
4. Add cereal and stir until completely combined. Turn off heat and let sit for a few minutes, until cool enough to handle.
5. When mixture has cooled enough, mold cereal mix into circles to look like pumpkins. Unwrap a Tootsie Roll and press into each pumpkin top.
6. Say a prayer of thanksgiving for these sweet treats and then enjoy!
Save Your Voice and Your Sanity: 
3 Ways to Effectively Get Students’ Attention
by Jared Dees

The class mumbles with whispering for a few moments. It grows to a murmur and before you know it, they are nearly shouting to the people next to them. How do you get their attention? How do you snap them out of discussion mode and back to listening mode without raising your voice? I’ve used a lot of different tactics over the years. Some work better than others. I will tell you that the thing that works the least is shouting.

Raising your voice to try to get students’ attention is frustrating. By its very nature, your entire emotional state shifts from peacefulness to aggression. Your blood pressure will rise whether you realize it or not. It is not the kind of day and life you want to live is it? Instead of shouting or raising your voice, try these techniques. I have used them all and each can be effective in their own way.

1. **Countdown**- Raise one hand in the air and countdown from five . . . four, three, two, one. If the students are trained and if you count slow enough, they should begin to listen. The problem with this method is that you will of ten find yourself saying, “two . . . one and a half . . . one and one quarter .”. It isn’t the perfect system and you may still find yourself raising your voice.

2. **Clap and Respond**
   “Clap once if you can hear me.” [Clap] “Clap three times if you can hear my voice.” [Clap. Clap. Clap] I like this method because you speak and they respond. It has kind of a viral component because the students closest to you clap first. They clap and the others in the room hear their clapping. A few more join in and before you know it…

See more at: http://www.thereligionteacher.com/getting-students-attention/#sthash.0DSa8ohK.dpuf