



10 Things You Can Do RIGHT NOW to Be a More Effective Catechist

By Joe Paprocki

Here are 10 things that you can do right now, with minimal effort, to make your religious education sessions more effective:

- 1. Plan in 10-minute Segments** – Most people today, and especially kids, are accustomed to commercial breaks every 10 minutes or so! As a catechist, you can use this to your advantage by planning your lessons so that every 10 minutes, you are “switching gears” and bringing variety to your lesson.
- 2. Arrive Early and Fill Up the Board** – Communicate your agenda to your students by arriving early to fill up the chalkboard or wipe-off board with information you’ll be drawing from during class. Not only does it express your plan and how organized you are, but it also frees you up from turning your back on your class to write on the board while teaching.
- 3. Greet Your Students by Name at the Door** – Another way of communicating your authority is to greet students at the door as they enter, almost blocking their way, to let them know that they are entering “your” space. Greeting them by name is hospitable, shows you care about them personally, and reinforces your authority.
- 4. Put Them to Work Immediately** – A good way to prevent poor behavior from ever beginning is to have tasks ready for your students to perform as soon as they enter the room. Whether it be setting up the prayer center or answering questions on a worksheet, let them know that you expect them to keep busy from the moment they arrive.

5. **Introduce a Liturgical Ritual** – Establish a climate of prayer by inviting your students to engage in a liturgical ritual/gesture early in the lesson. Consider inviting them to participate in a procession around the room to enthrone your Bible in the prayer center or inviting them to stand and trace the Cross with their thumbs on their foreheads, lips, and hearts as they pray, “May the Word of God be in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.”
6. **Have Students Bring in Their Own Sacred Objects for the Prayer Table** – After you’ve chosen a few sacred objects to place on your prayer table – a Bible, a Cross, a bowl of holy water, a candle – invite your students to bring in symbols of their faith to add. It might be a Rosary, a holy card, a prayer book, a medal, or something from nature such as a rock or leaf.
7. **Integrate Silence and Music** – To further establish a climate of prayer, be sure to work in some periods of silence as well as music, whether sung or listened to. This can help your students to focus, relax, and overcome distractions.
8. **Add a Twist to Reading Aloud from the Textbook** – You can spice up the act of reading from the textbook by bringing in a foam ball to toss to the student whose turn it is to read. Invite them to toss the ball (underhand!) to the next student who is to continue reading. This involves them in the act of increasing class participation.
9. **As They Leave, Have Students Tell You ONE THING They Learned** – It’s important to assess whether or not our students are learning what we teach. A good way to quickly assess this is to require each student to say one thing that they learned in class before they leave. This also helps them to prepare to respond to their parents intelligently when their parents ask, “What did you learn in religious education today?”
10. **Have Students Bless Themselves with Holy Water as They Leave** – You can end your sessions on a prayerful note by having the students bless themselves with holy water as they depart. Consider standing by the door holding the bowl of holy water as they leave.