



Catechist Conversation Guide

This year, many catechists are unable to serve in their typical role as a classroom teacher to a group of students. With programs occurring online and parents participating in more faith formation at home, some parishes are choosing to utilize their catechists in new ways. Some catechists are being assigned to support a group of families who they will reach out to each month, either with phone calls or through a virtual platform. Here are some suggestions to guide those conversations with parents.

First, simply ask how they are doing. This is essential!

- How is your family doing?
- How are you managing the new 'back to school' process?
- How are your children dealing with being back to school in person, online?
- What is the biggest stressor that your family is facing at this time?
- What are the challenges you are facing as a mom, dad, as a family?

Now you can weave faith into the conversation...but not yet details about the program.

- Is there anything I can help you with?
- How can our parish family help you? This is a good opportunity to share some of the ministries your parish offers.
- Is there something I can lift up in prayer for you?
 - Some catechists are dedicating a specific time each week to pray for the children and families they are serving this year. If you plan to do something like this, let the person you are speaking to know. **Never underestimate how powerful it can be to offer to pray for someone's intentions.**

If it feels comfortable, ask if you can pray WITH them and either fashion a quick, simple and heartfelt prayer or read a prayer you have found that will provide comfort, peace or hope for this family.

- Example: "Dear Lord, we ask you to bless the Smith family this week. Please blanket them with your peace. Allow them to experience your joy this week as they manage all that is on their plate. (add in specific prayer intention at this point) Amen."
- In addition, volunteer to find a prayer or scripture verse that would be specific to the needs of the family. This provides continued interaction with the family and lets them know that you have their best interests in mind, and provides an opportunity for follow-up.

The very last thing you should address is the program. This could even take place in a separate phone call. It cannot appear that the call was made to "check up on them" or hold them accountable. Yes, we certainly want families who are doing at-home or online faith formation to be accountable, but this phone call is a pastoral outreach. It is a way to evangelize families that may not yet have encountered Jesus in personal ways. You are serving as the face of Jesus in that moment. Allow love to lead your conversation.

As the family member starts to feel comfortable with your calls and begins to open up, ask how they feel about the faith formation program.

- Has it been manageable?
- Are they enjoying the process with their child(ren)?
- What have been the challenges with engaging in the process?

You can ask a specific question at this point.

- For example, did you get a chance to create the family prayer center at home?
- Did you get a chance to try one of the Advent activities from this month's list?
 - Give praise if a yes response is given and find ways to elaborate and add to the conversation.
 - Give encouragement if a no response is given.
 - "Why don't you try to watch the video clip on the story of the birth of Jesus? That seems like it will be a good fit for the age of your children. I'd love to know what you thought of it once you watch it."

Remember that your predominant role this year as a catechist is to be a coach and mentor to families. It is to apprentice them in faith. Parents can carry guilt or even shame about the way they have fallen short of raising their children in the faith. They may not feel confident or equipped for this task, especially if they do not experience a personal relationship with Jesus. This may manifest as an issue with priorities, but often is due to a lack of understanding of the many ways our lives are enriched when we welcome Jesus into our homes and lives.

The important thing to remember is that they brought their child forward to enter our programs, so that is where our hope lies. This is where the Holy Spirit can do meaningful work with a family.

Also, keep in mind that some parents do not have a strong faith vocabulary. Talking about Jesus or prayer may feel uncomfortable or strange. Any conversation you have with a parent that will help grow their faith vocabulary in organic ways will help assist parents in articulating faith at home with their child. Deep theological language or 'church-talk' might be intimidating, so keep the conversation gentle.

Do not expect a long conversation each time, but be prepared for how the Holy Spirit will use these moments. Try not to be discouraged if the conversation is brief. Prepare yourself to be surprised in the beautiful ways you can minister to families with this new approach as a catechist.

If you have any questions about mentoring and coaching families in the faith, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

With Jesus in our hearts,

Kelly Henderschedt
Archdiocesan Director of Catechesis
kelly.henderschedt@aohct.org