

CATECHETICAL STAFF

A PROCESS FOR RECRUITING CATECHISTS

To recruit and retain the kind of volunteers needed, look to the example of Jesus. Jesus called disciples to the service of the Reign of God **by name**. Jesus used personal invitation. How does one find volunteers for the catechist role? We must first understand the gifts and skills of potential catechists. These gifts and skills are given by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and grow because of a commitment to participate in the teaching mission of the church. Leaders **should not use** parish bulletin announcements to discern catechists or helpers for the program.

Review the qualities of the catechist on the previous pages and identify people in the parish who have those qualities. Most catechists will respond only to the extent that they know and trust the religious education leader and feel that they are known. Thinking about the recruiting of catechists as the filling of slots will guarantee that one has little success over the long term. Recruiting is about building relationships with the people that God has gifted for the building up of the Reign of God.

Building relationships is always a gradual process. Rarely do we meet someone and feel immediately comfortable with them. When a prospective catechist first encounters the idea of helping with the religious education program, the encounter should be limited, short and important. No one likes the feeling of being trapped. If one moves too quickly and pushes the volunteer into a position they are not ready for, then the seeds of leaving are already sown. Feeling pushed leads to feelings of resentment.

Invite people to work on short projects (First Communion party or a retreat, etc.) As a relationship begins to grow and the person begins to see the kinds of needs that the program has, they may offer to help. Most often, however, one will find oneself in the position of needing to help people see the gifts in themselves that they do not see. The most successful recruiter is the one who sees and affirms gifts in people.

The recruiting of catechists / helpers is a slow process. People volunteer for different reasons. Some are seeking personal fulfillment and growth, some will respond because of who it is that asks them and some respond out of a sense of duty. The recruitment process must constantly invite people into this ministry sensitive to the variety of reasons for volunteering. Initial motivations may be varied but how the person comes to the point of saying yes to assisting in the parish program is less important than the fact that they do.

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This period of getting to know the person will also help discern the person's gifts and identify where in the program they would be of the most help. Continue to invite them into more and more opportunities for involvement so that the person's gifts can be affirmed and the relationship deepened. This last point is very important. This is not a process of manipulating people but rather a way of forming community, affirming gifts and calling people to use their gifts in service to the Gospel for the good of the People of God.

There should be attractive and informative literature available so that prospective volunteers can learn something about the ministry. Literature like this should be simple and to the point. Include a phone number, use a photo or logo that conveys the spirit of the ministry. Children's drawings can be inexpensive and elicit great opening conversations. Use quality materials. Nothing speaks louder about the future of volunteering than print that is hard to read on paper that rips in the prospective volunteer's hand. Don't skimp on the literature that will be presented as a part of the invitation to your ministry. If there is literature which is well-thought-out that prospective volunteers can put their hands on, they get the idea that your program is concrete and the need for their help is real. Include with the literature a copy of the program mission and vision statements, the program handbooks for students and catechists, a schedule of classes and meetings scheduled for the year and a job description. All of these items will help the prospective volunteer make an informed decision.

Remember the prospective volunteer is sizing up both the leader and the program. People want to be a part of something which is both creative and worthwhile. Be organized and punctual. The leader should demonstrate the seriousness with which they minister and show genuine appreciation for the volunteer's interest. Explain to the potential catechist how their ministry interacts and supports the mission of the parish, the mission of the Bishop, and ultimately the mission of Jesus.

Also remember that the public affirmation and support of the current catechists is a great recruiting process. Describe the successes of the program and the work of the catechists in the bulletin, parish newsletter and local paper. Keep the story of the work real and visible to the community.

Recruitment should be on-going with the present catechists, as well. Their enthusiasm for the ministry is critical in attracting new people.

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A RECRUITING TOOL



One effective recruiting tool is the Volunteer Open House. This could be an evening gathering with cheese and crackers, or a Saturday morning continental breakfast, or after a weekend liturgy, or even a Sunday afternoon ice cream social. At this event displays and exhibits present an overview of the catechetical program and the needed tasks related to it. A volunteer opportunity sheet would be readily available, along with copies of the textbooks being used. The current team of catechists could do presentations and be available to answer questions and offer hospitality.

This is a “come and see” event in the spirit of Jesus, although it probably offers more concrete information than Jesus did at his early recruiting sessions. There might be a video of some of the previous year’s activities or at the very least a photo board of program events and highlights. The emphasis should be on finding out from prospective volunteers their hopes about volunteering and maybe even some of the things they specifically need. Participants can fill out cards with their name, address, phone and the best time to reach them (see the volunteering form). Ask them to indicate their preference of ministries, availability of times and special needs like baby-sitting and transportation. These leads can then point in the direction of a more formal interview.

Much of this section on recruiting is indebted to *Recruiting and Training Volunteer Catechists* by Teresa Smith, NCCL and Loyola Press, 1990