

CATECHETICAL STAFF

SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS

Supporting volunteers is a priority and continuous challenge for the religious education leader. The leader must remember that volunteers achieve satisfaction from the motivation that lead them to volunteer in the first place. The challenge for the religious education leader is the realization that motivation changes across the span of a volunteer's time with the program.

WHY DID THEY VOLUNTEER?

- Seeking a change of pace or scene (A young mother looking for company)
- A desire to help
- Spiritual ideals expressed in service
- Willingness to follow someone they trust and respect
- An expression of their personality type (I'm the kind that just gets involved)
- Paying back for a good already done for them (God or parish)
- Looking to develop new skills or to grow as a person
- A need to belong to something larger than themselves
- A need for recognition

Understanding these motivations will help the religious education leader to recognize that there is no one method or program to reward and support people with such a wide variety of reasons for volunteering. Efforts to provide support must attempt to respond to this wide variety of reasons for volunteering. Some types of recognition activities may in fact run contrary to the needs of some of the volunteers. For example, consider someone who is volunteering as a way to repay God for a gift that God has given them. This individual may not wish to participate in a Catechetical Sunday celebration where they stand up and are recognized by the community because they feel that they have already received something and this recognition is perceived as grandstanding. However, catechists of this mindset may agree to participate when they understand how important it is for parents to observe those adults who have been entrusted to teach their children. Since the title of catechist is conferred by the community and recognizes the dignity of the Baptized Catholic Christian, it is important that the catechist be acknowledged by the community.

Consider a variety of types of support. Cards throughout the year will motivate the person who is responding to you as the leader while financial support to take a course will motivate the person who is seeking skill or knowledge development. Tailor recognition and support to the needs of the individual.

Encourage parish involvement in welcoming and affirming catechists. One opportunity for this is acknowledgment of catechists on Catechetical Sunday, held each year in September. The challenge, however, is to involve the community as more than just spectators.

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SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS, CONT'D

Another volunteer support opportunity is an appreciation dinner; yet realize that many people are struggling to balance family commitments with time away from home. Maybe having a dinner prepared for a catechist's family once a month would go a long way towards helping them balance teaching and coaching as an alternative to coming out to a dinner. While this may be an extravagant idea remember that most catechists appreciate small gestures which affirm their contribution.

Consider thanks in the parish newsletter, bulletin and local paper. Feature quality work and recognize quality effort on behalf of the Gospel. Most volunteers are not in this for personal recognition, but they will seize any opportunity to showcase those they teach. Provide the opportunity for them to tell others about the good work they are doing. The reward and motivating support will be apparent as they show-off the children and youth.

Support also includes giving catechists the opportunity to be involved in planning the parish catechetical program. People want to be involved in something that is making a difference. If you see catechists as resources for making the program better instead of just bodies filling slots they will respond with creative ideas to enhance the program. In doing so, they will enhance their own motivation to continue because they are valued members of a team.

Also, if you have not already seen the video section of the *Diocesan New Leader Orientation* done by Pam Davis from Conneaut Lake - please take the time to do so - it is full of wonderfully practical ideas to support your catechists.

