

Where is Jesus When I Teach Unchurched Children?

Therese Boucher

It is no secret that the majority of children in religious education programs and even most Catholic schools, come from families that are not regular churchgoers. As a result, everything we teach may seem foreign or irrelevant to them. One catechist put it this way. "I feel like I am teaching Greek!" But take heart! There are ways that we can stir up the waters of Baptism and highlight the presence of Jesus, as we teach children from inactive families.

A. One of the first steps is to identify which challenges are most difficult to face. Rate the following in order of their importance FOR YOU. Then share your responses. What thoughts and emotions do these challenges trigger in you?

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|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ___ little experience with liturgy | ___ no religious language |
| ___ unfamiliar with Scripture | ___ small expectations of God |
| ___ inactive in parish community | ___ indifferent to religious learning |

B. Focus on the two challenges that are most troublesome for you to address. What strategies have you tried? Which strategies have been most and least successful? How could catechists support one another in addressing these needs? What strategies might be used to address inactive families, as we bring the Good News of Jesus to bear on the underlying needs behind the challenge that children present?

C. Another step is to get in touch with your understanding of Jesus and the gift of God's love that has already been given in Baptism and offered in Confirmation and Eucharist. Fill in the blanks to get your own bearings as a catechist capable of sharing faith and evangelizing.

- When I close my eyes and try to picture Jesus, I see
- An event in the life of Jesus that I can identify with is
- More than anything, I wish Jesus would
- A place where I experience the presence of God is
- If I could ask Jesus to explain one thing it would be
- One way that Jesus is present in my students' lives is
- A place in my classroom where Jesus might sit or stand is

D. Share an experience of God's presence in your catechetical sessions. Pray the following prayer before you begin preparing each lesson. Visualize the room where you teach, then visualize Jesus standing beside each young person for a moment and placing his hand on her or him.

God, may the words that I speak to your children be like snow and rain, allowing your love to shower down on them. Make me an instrument of your abiding love. I bring each child into your presence now. Lord Jesus, I ask you to be with _____ (insert a name). Jesus, our redeemer, touch _____ (insert a name). Jesus, prince of peace, come to _____ (insert a name). Show yourself to each one in whatever way you choose. I thank you ahead of time for using me to bless your children. Help me persevere as a faithful witness, so that you can touch each one in whatever way you choose. Amen.

If you are praying in a group, pray this prayer together, insert "all of my children" instead of one name and then allow a few moments for everyone to pray children's names aloud as they come to mind, like pop corn be activated by God's Holy Spirit in our midst. Close with an "Our Father" or a hymn.

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