
FOR A FAMILY- AND PARISH-BASED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



The religious education workshop that was held [in French] at the Diocesan Centre and at the Assumption Church Parish Hall in Grand Falls, August 23, 24, and 25, was a truly successful undertaking. About two hundred people attended, pastoral agents, parish pastoral team members, teachers, but especially parents who optimistically and enthusiastically acclaimed this faith undertaking proposed to their children. With the help of Sister Jeannette Girard, F.M.A., of the Gaspé Diocese and of Brother Rosaire Girard, F.S.C. of the Bathurst Diocese as resource persons, we were able to study the guiding principles of catechetics and to get acquainted with a few of the programmes offered.

At-Home Sharing

The method propounded is that of the parent-child dialogue. It is not a theology or a religion course that we are about, but a journey of faith with the child. Hence, at the very first engagement with the child, the objective aimed at is to have the child discover the life that is around him, and to name the Source of that life. The discovery of God, Source of life, is made in stages. The child is led first to marvel at the richness of life all around him: the plants, animals, and human beings. The parents, too, are invited to join their child in discovering the marvels around them. To develop in the child its capacity to marvel is at the same time to help the child respect the life which surrounds him, and to open his heart to gratitude for the gift of life.

ONCE UPON A TIME...

At the most opportune time, when the child is more receptive, perhaps at bedtime, it is recommended that the parent tell the child a story: "Once upon a time there was a young boy named David and a young girl named Caroline. One day, they both decided to go off to discover life. Along the way they came across a dog, a butterfly, and a few daisies. Suddenly they bent down to inspect a nest that was there in the grass. There were mottled birds' eggs in the nest. 'David, I wonder where these eggs come from.' 'Easy, Caroline: These are birds' eggs. Listen to the bird crying, up in the tree. That is certainly the mother bird...' 'Yes, but who made the bird? And the daisy? And the rain? And my dog Spot?' Sitting side by side on the tender green grass they inhale the pure summer air. They look around. Everything is alive. And they wonder where all this that is alive has come from... - And you, when you run out to play, do you ever come across interesting things? Who is your best friend in all of nature?... " Stories like this can lead the child to discover the Source of life.

QUALITY PROGRAMMING

Taking into consideration the following facts: the positive five-year experience of the Bathurst Diocese in this area; the quality and ease of use of documents adapted by the diocesan office; the permission given to us by the Bathurst Diocese to reproduce these documents free of charge, we have opted for these fine catechetical tools, although parents may get other, better illustrated and coloured books, at their own expense. Experience has shown, however, that children prefer plain black-and-white documents they can colour themselves to already-coloured textbooks. What matters first and foremost, though, is the development of faith, and the parent-child relationship; the tool is just that: a tool.

MAJOR PRINCIPLES

Like religious education, catechetics seeks to encourage the child's over-all development by following three major principles: the human being seeks to satisfy his basic needs to know, love, be loved, produce and develop his capacities for wonder and delight, communion, and commitment; he is open to the transcendent. The human being who develops his capacities discovers individual and collective values and opens himself to others and to God. The

human being who discovers and welcomes the person and message of Jesus Christ grows and develops his original potential.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Catechetics aims at the development of the child, at its inner growth and the strengthening of its personality; it encourages the development of the child's moral and spiritual resources and invites the child to follow Jesus. In this way catechetics pays special attention to the 6-to-11 year olds' basic needs: to know, to love and to be loved, while especially developing the child's capacity for wonder and delight, communion, and commitment.

OPENNESS TO GOD AND TO OTHERS

The child's evolution allows him to open himself quickly to others, to discover and accept individual and collective values. These values are human realities: personality traits, natural propensities, feelings, attitudes we decide to stress because they contribute to moral and religious progress. respect for life, for one's milieu, one's environment, openness to others, kindness, sharing, helping others, responsibility, a sense of belonging, friendship, fellowship, living in communion, solidarity, availability, and fidelity, all of these are given pride of place in the catechetical programme. Catechetics seeks to help the child open up to God, and very early on the child raises questions about life, death, time, happiness...

A VITAL DISCOVERY

The very heart of the Christian experience is the discovery and welcome of the person and message of Jesus Christ who reveals himself in the deepest recesses of the person. Catechetics aims not only at making the fundamentals of the Christian faith known as best as possible to the child, but it endeavours to stimulate a constant relationship between the child's life and the Word of God, between the child's life and the life of Jesus Christ and of Christians, a dialogue established to open up to a word of faith in Jesus Christ himself. This attachment of faith to Jesus is mysterious, often discrete, even unsuspected. It is in any case more a seed than a full-grown plant. It is first of all an energy of the Spirit in the child's growth process. It aids in developing in the child those Gospel attitudes inspired by Jesus and his message.

WONDERFUL CONTENT

"God Is Love," "See How They Love One Another," "Remain in My Love," "I Am with You," "Driven by the Spirit," "Make Me Live," "A Light unto My Path": Titles which invite us to welcome the person and message of Jesus. The 6-year-old will become aware that God is the source of life by opening up to the riches of life around him. The child's capacity to marvel and delight can become even stronger by his growing awareness of the life within him. The 7-year-old is invited to recognise the kindly presence of friendship in his life as in the life of Jesus. Thanks to the Word of God, the child learns that Jesus has friends and that he showed his love for them in different ways. By gradually working towards life in communion, the child prepares himself to very soon welcome the Lord Jesus in his heart through the Eucharist. The 8-year-old learns that God the Father created the earth our home, and that we are called to continue His creation; he discovers also that Jesus came into the world to reveal and realise the Father's dream to unite all men and women in love. The 9-year-old is led into his discovery of the Jesus event through the Gospels, and he is invited to open himself to the experience of the Christian communities, especially those that hope for and work for a better world. The 10-year-old is led to an understanding of the Spirit's action in the life of the Christian and of the Church. Just as the Spirit was in Jesus of Nazareth, so is he in every Christian; He leads them to carry out the responsibilities which Jesus gave them before going back to his Father. The 11-year-old is led to an understanding of the values espoused by Jesus; they are a source of inspiration for the Christian life. Looking at the life of Jesus will be appealing: Jesus will invite him to live a liberating freedom which will gradually make him a sign of the liberating will of the living God. Then he will complete a synthesis of those elements which are basic to the Christian faith, and in union with the Church he shall compose a creed which expresses his inner motivations. The ages mentioned above are approximate, and they are mentioned here only as markers of the life which progresses year after year. Each parent will have the task of personalising as well as possible the spiritual and catechetical journey of each child. What marvels there are to share! To learn more about family-based religious education and catechetics, do not hesitate to contact your parish religious education coordinators.

Have a good week!

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