

Contents

When I'm Planning a Session	5
When I Don't Know the Families of My Learners	6
When I Don't Feel Creative	7
When Everything Seems to Be Changing	8
When I'm Not Experiencing What I'm Teaching	9
When My Heart Isn't In It	10
When My Learners Aren't in Church on Sunday	11
When There Doesn't Seem to Be Enough Time for Each Learner	12
When I Don't Know Enough about This Week's Topic	13
When I Want to Stay on Track with My Plans But Also Want to Be Open to the Spirit	14
When I Don't Feel I Am Effective	15
When I Feel Completely Overwhelmed	16

When Children/Youth Speak Unkindly to Each Other.....	17
When I Feel Like Something Is Missing.....	18
When I Wonder: Does Anyone Really Care?.....	19
When One of My Learners Has Experienced a Major Loss, Such as the Death of a Parent.....	20
When I Am Unsure of All the Answers.....	21
When There's So Much to Share	22
When I Think That Nothing Got Accomplished	23
When I Feel I'm in a Slump	24
When I Feel Disappointed That a Session Did Not Go Well.....	25
When I Wonder If My Suggestions for At-Home Activities Are Meaningful....	26
When a Session Went Really Well.....	27
When I Saw a Child/Youth Do Something We Talked About.....	28
When I Met God in an Unexpected Way.....	29
When I Was Able to Connect with a Parent.....	30

When I'm Planning a Session

Planning takes time; it might feel redundant and monotonous. Yet, one of Benjamin Franklin's wise sayings was: "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!" Because of the responsibility of catechizing, planning is vital—and is God's work.

To make your planning time energetic, creative, and faith-filled, surround yourself with many ideas related to the session's theme: your text, a list of resources from the parish, your gathering file (see the action below), your family, happenings in your school/parish, neighborhood, world, and what others who are teaching the same session are doing.

Give yourself as much time as possible to ponder and pray. With time for quiet, choose from all your thoughts and resources, writing a session plan that includes the session's key elements in your text.

CALMING MEDITATION ■ As you sit down to plan your session, place your hands on the arm of your chair. Imagine that the arms of your chair are the arms of God supporting and holding you. As you plan your catechetical session, know that you, your learners, and your plans are held in God's hands.

COMMITTED ACTION ■ Create a gathering file: Make a file folder for each of the themes/topics your text covers. When you see/hear a poem, a song, a prayer, a current event, etc., that relates to a theme, file it away so that when you come to plan each session, you will have a plethora of ideas to choose from.

When I Don't Know the Families of My Learners

Faith does not grow in isolation; the faith of each one of us (especially children and youth) is impacted by all we are, all we do, and all the people in our lives. For young people, the most constant and enduring influence is their parents and families.

Be creative and intentional in getting to know the parents and families of your children and youth. Knowing them, having a relationship with them, will help you design your sessions and the examples you use. The families and children will be touched by the personal interest you show in them.

Before the year begins, call the parents to introduce yourself. Ask what you can do for them; ask for their ideas on how you can work alongside them as together you surround their child with a faith-filled environment. Respond to the families throughout the year, especially to any happenings you hear about: births, illness, special achievements, deaths.

CALMING MEDITATION ■ *God of All Families, bless the families with whom and to whom I will be ministering during this year. As you protect and care for them, empower me to be a faith-filled witness, a sign of your love for them.*

COMMITTED ACTION ■ Make a plan to call or email each parent (perhaps one family each week) to give a compliment about their child, sharing something considerate they have done or a trait/virtue you have witnessed in them.

When I Don't Feel Creative

What do we mean by creativity? Our role is not to be an art teacher. When we do use artistic expression—and we should—it's for the purpose of helping others delve deeper into meanings and express for themselves their understanding of the connection between faith and life.

God made us human, gifting us with creativity. All people have the capacity to be creative.

Steve Jobs said, “Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things.” That's what catechists do: connect faith and everyday life.

Creativity in our learning times can be invited and enhanced as we create opportunities for reflection; go beyond textbooks and worksheets and work with a variety of learning materials; provide hands-on learning; encourage learners to choose the format they want to follow for their response (a photo essay, skit, diorama, video, or recipe); explore different cultures; and create an atmosphere of community building and cooperation.

CALMING MEDITATION ■ *God of Creativity, inspire me, guide me, in enthusiastically seeing with new eyes, connecting your love to all I'm called to do.*

COMMITTED ACTION ■ As you plan your sessions, ask: Do the activities allow for the imagination, the dreaming, the wondering, the response of each learner, or do I expect the end result to be the way I want it?

When Everything Seems to Be Changing

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus wrote (in more than 100 pieces of his writings), “Change is the only constant.” Over the years, this saying has been revised to “The only constant in life is change.”

All of us can say that we experience the constancy of change in countless ways today. As catechists, we, too, meet it in various ways: new ways of catechizing are suggested; the needs of children and families always seem to be multiplying; many parishes—and their organizational structures—are changing; parishes are being closed, clustered, or merged; and so on.

As committed catechists, respond to change through the 4 Ps: Patiently; Persistently (not giving up); Positively (with Christian hope); and staying rooted in Purpose (responding to God’s call to serve).

CALMING MEDITATION ■ Throughout the ages, one form of meditation has been to silently repeat a sacred word (mantra) or Scripture passage. Choose a short passage from Scripture which you can pray often throughout the day, such as “*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*” (Psalm 23:1); “*Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid*” (John 14:27); “*Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you*” (Psalm 55:23); or “*I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20).

COMMITTED ACTION ■ When you are experiencing change in your catechetical setting or parish, write down the positives that are coming (or might come) from the change.

When I'm Not Experiencing What I'm Teaching

Do you ever feel: I'm teaching about a God of Comfort, but I often feel anxious and worried. I'm teaching about a God of Joy, but I'm experiencing disappointments and burdens. I'm teaching about a God of Unceasing Nearness, but at times I don't feel God is with me, especially in the hard times. I'm teaching about a God of Strength and Promise, but I feel as though I don't know where to turn, what to do next.

Living a faith-filled life doesn't mean there won't be setbacks or difficult times. Being a catechist doesn't mean that everything will be perfect, carefree, and peaceful in our lives. Perhaps it's because of our questions, our real-life experiences of uncertainties, concerns, and fears, that we can better understand our learners and their families, that we learn more and more to depend on the God who can always be trusted.

CALMING MEDITATION ■ *Reassuring God, deepen in me the peace that only you can give. Help me to always hear you say, "You don't have to know the way. I do."*

COMMITTED ACTION ■ As you prepare your sessions and lead your young people through them, through an exploration of our Compassionate God of Constant Presence, take time to pretend that you are the learner. What are you hearing in God's message? How and what does God want you to learn, to reflect on, to deepen at this time in your journey of life?