

## The Teacher as Catechist: Evangelizer

### Introduction

*“Catechesis develops a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ, encourages more profound incorporation into the Church, and nourishes Christian living ... Just as the mission of evangelization enlivens the Church’s pastoral and missionary activity, catechesis makes concrete her mission of evangelization.”* (NDC, 22, p. 68)

Jesus evangelized people. In short, he brought the Good News of God’s love to them in his words and actions. When the people were open and received the Good News, they believed. Their lives were changed! This segment is meant to help you reflect on yourself as an evangelizer as well as evangelizing in today’s world. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting or journaling on the *first question*. Then read the article “Evangelizer and Catechist” and jot down your responses to the *reflection questions*.

### First Question

- How would you describe an evangelizer?

### Article: Evangelizer and Teacher

It is possible that you have some preconceived images of evangelizers. Is it the person who stands on the street corner and loudly proclaims “Jesus saves” or one of the dramatic and charismatic TV preachers, or the person who knocks on doors and gives witness to their faith to those who will listen? Catholic evangelization is not usually the street corner, door-knocking kind. Even our television evangelists present

the Good News in a less dramatic fashion. Although our methods and manner of proclaiming it are different, the message is the same: God does love you; Jesus does save; believe in the Good News.

You may wonder why evangelization is so important in the Catholic School setting today. Fifty years ago evangelization was not a vocabulary word in Catholic education. It was assumed that the young people who came into Catholic schools did have initial faith in Jesus and the Church. They were evangelized in the family and in “Catholic” neighborhood settings. Today we do not assume that to be the case. Sadly, young people do come into Catholic schools not knowing who Jesus is or that there is a God who loves them and cares about them. Often the Catholic school is the first concrete Catholic environment young people come in contact with. To describe the reasons for this is not the purpose of this article.

As a religion teacher, you have a unique opportunity to lead others to Christ and to foster ongoing, lifelong faith formation and spiritual growth. Successful evangelization and catechesis go hand in hand, and are essentially inseparable. In your teaching you will find yourself motivated to develop creative ways of bringing alive the Good News, using catechesis as a tool for truly evangelizing students and their families. It begins with you. Jesus is the model. Jesus told stories about God, and he acted in ways that made God real to people. True, he performed some miraculous deeds that brought people to faith, but for the most part people appear to have been attracted by his person and his manner of including the downcast and the alienated. The essential components of being an evangelizer are possessing a genuine zest for the faith and living as a disciple in love and service to others.

As Jesus did, religion teachers, as catechists, must nurture their personal relationship with God and take the everyday stuff of life and see it through the eyes of faith. In Catholic school religion classes, we need to go above and beyond providing information by truly connecting faith to the lives of young people.

Here are some practical ways to do that:

- Point out ways in which our faith helps us to reflect on other aspects of daily life and education. Prompt students to think of other ways that their faith has an impact on how they live and work as students.
- Show an interest in the young people. Call them by name. Welcome them as they arrive. Remember the things they tell you about themselves and follow up with them.
- Make a special effort to include the young people who seem to be on the fringes of the class.
- Witness often about your faith and how it helps you live a good life.
- When unexpected events occur, happy or sad, pray spontaneously with the children about them.
- There may be young people in your class who have not been to Mass often, so make sure they know the prayers and rituals and will be comfortable.
- Make the concept of “Christian companioning” a reality with your class. Emphasize the importance of group sharing and respect for each other. Starting with third grade, have students work in groups

or in pairs often.

- At the heart of our Christian lives and of evangelization is the person of the living Jesus whom we meet in the Gospel. Pay attention to how the Gospel is proclaimed and heard during your classes. Find ways, there are many examples in *Alive in Christ*, to make the Gospel come alive for young people. Help them see how to bring it into their own daily experiences.

### Reflection Questions

- Having read this article, how would you describe being an evangelizer in a Catholic school setting?
- Why do you think evangelization is necessary in Catholic schools?