

## **Let Your Lessons Travel Home to the Families**

Janet Schaeffler, OP

“Do you believe in God?” the catechist asked. The child enthusiastically replied, “Yes!”

“Why do you believe in God?” the catechist inquired.

The child thought a moment and then answered, “I don’t know why. I think it runs in the family.”

The reply that we’re certainly all desirous of hearing! The awesome privilege which each of us has as creative catechists is that our ministry is never only to the children, the youth with whom we meet each week/each day. Our ministry is to them, and reaches beyond them to their whole family.

We realize that because we know that what happens in our sessions gets carried over, talked about at home (hopefully), but is there more to it than that? Are there ways we can be intentional and proactive in ministering with/to the parents and the entire family? Let’s explore some, looking at two categories: connection and participation. (Choose the ones that will work for you.)

### **Connection with parents and families**

- Before the year begins, call your parents, introducing yourself, sharing your plans for being a co-partner with them during this year of continuing growth in faith with their child, their family. (Call each child/youth in your group, too, before the year begins.)
- Be available, as much as possible, before and after each catechetical session, as the parents are bringing and picking up the children/youth, to talk with them, see how they’re doing. Learn their names right away, their concerns and interests.

- When a child mentions to you, or during a session, that there is an illness/death in the family or a new baby/special occasion, in the family, etc., send a card, make a phone call to the parents to see how things are or offer congratulations.
- Each week write a note, email, or make a phone call to a different one of your child's parents, simply to let them know what a joy it is to have their child in your group, or specifically compliment the child/youth on something they have recently done. Use this time, too, to affirm the parents for the great job they're doing as Catholic parents. (Keep a list/chart so that each child gets a turn; when you have gone through your group, start over.)
- Use the parents' pages which come with your catechetical text (or make your own) to keep your parents up-to-date on the themes and topics being studied and experienced in your sessions.
- Ask the parents for their thoughts, their ideas, their evaluations on how things are going for their children/youth, for their family. What else do they need? What else would help them?

### **Invite On-going Participation in the Journey of Faith**

- Plan prayer services sometimes at the end of your sessions, inviting parents to join their children.
- Plan your sessions as often as you can in a manner in which help is needed, e.g. other adult-aides in the learning area with you. Invite your parents to be partners with you.
- Involve your families in the life of the parish. Let them know of seasonal prayer experiences, parish service opportunities, family social events. Encourage their participation.
- Request from the parents their email addresses (explaining why you want them). Once a week, send them a short email with one idea: a family prayer, a question to talk about, a Scripture passage to read and discuss, something to do as a family, a service activity, etc.

- As often as you can, prepare for a future session, by having the children/youth “interview” their parents, older family members, grandparents, etc., such as: “What is your definition of church?” “What do you remember about your Confirmation?” “When do you pray?” “When do you find it hard to be a Christian?”
- As frequently as possible, design your session activities that will carry over at home: the writing of a prayer to be prayed before dinner; my family’s plan for caring for God’s creation, etc.
- Provide your families with some questions to analyze their favorite TV programs (or the commercials) according to Gospel values, Jesus’ lifestyle, or a specific theme you are currently studying.
- The liturgical seasons have the power of touching people’s lives, especially family life. Email or send home a short explanation of a family ritual for each season. Explain it to the children/youth ahead first, to create enthusiasm.
- Plan a service opportunity for the families of your group. Each family can drive themselves and meet at the location; you won’t need, then, to provide permission slips and chaperones. Don’t forget a reflection time sometime afterward: What did I learn? What happened to me? How am I different because of what I experienced? What will I do now because of what I experienced?

[www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com)

Copyright © 2010 [Janet Schaeffler, OP]. All Rights Reserved.