

Lesson Plan Format

Topic _____

Intercessor(s) _____



Preparation

Sacred Space: Bible, Crucifix and/or Sacred Art, candle. How will you provide a “calculated disengagement”? How will you prepare the soil of their hearts and minds to receive God’s Word? Examples: a hymn, a saint story, and/or a reading from Scripture and opening prayer?

Proclamation

What is the statement of truth (major point) for the teaching that should stay with them? It is one short sentence of proclamation. It answers the question: “What did you learn today?”

Explanation-Exploration of this Truth

What are the 3 or 4 essential points that will give a clear and complete grasp of the teaching? What are the ways you are going to help students to draw out the meaning of these essential points? For example: chalk talk, guided discovery through Bible verses, art project, Scripture meditation, looking at sacred art, etc. How will your teaching lead them closer to Christ? What is to be memorized?

Application to Life/Appropriation into our Life

How can you help the students to make this teaching their own? How will you witness this truth to the students with a brief, personal testimony, a saint or Scripture story or meditation?

Discussion questions can be used to draw out such questions as: How does this teaching affect you? What does this Truth call forth from us? How will we respond to Christ by cooperating with His grace?

Celebration

How can we thank God and acclaim His wonderful truth together by ending in prayer? The prayer of celebration is to develop further our attitude of thankfulness toward God: a hymn, a song or Psalm, the Liturgy of the Hours, silent reflection, litany, spontaneous/rote prayer, etc.

Remember to:

Evaluate to determine if students comprehended the lesson. Did they show interest and excitement? Did they ask questions and was there fruitful discussion? What will you use to know that they have heard and understood the essentials: a quiz, writing a summary paragraph, a question and answer exercise that summarizes it?

Include aids to encounter Christ in the home: homework and parent page.

Catechetical Methodology: *Catechesis that Changes Hearts*

In teaching the Faith, it is essential to imitate God's way of drawing us to Himself. When God reveals something to us in the Scriptures, through a homily or in prayer, He showers us with actual grace so that we can understand. He then waits for us to make a response of faith. When we respond, He reveals more. God repeats the process with each person, over and over again, so that we come to know Him more deeply.

We have the example of Jesus continually guiding Peter deeper in his faith through this process. After Jesus calls Peter to come and follow Him, Jesus reveals many things to him: Jesus cures his mother-in-law, calms the storm, feeds the five thousand and walks on water. Jesus then asks Peter Who He is. Peter makes the response of faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). We know that grace has accompanied these revelations by Jesus' next remark: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father Who is in Heaven."

In any teaching situation, we can follow this same methodology in a five-step process: **the Preparation, a Proclamation, an Explanation, an Application and Appropriation into Life, and a Celebration.**¹

The first step, the **Preparation**, is to bring the children, young people, and/or adults out of their busy lives, to disengage them from their worries and concerns and help them to be receptive to Jesus and his Word. Being ready for them when they arrive by knowing their names, not being preoccupied and asking about their week is essential. A "sacred space" as a focal point in the room with a Bible, candle, a crucifix or piece of sacred art related to the teaching is also necessary. The sacred space allows the students to know that they have entered something different than a class on math or science. It is effective to also use music, a saint story, a brief, personal testimony, and/or a reading from an appropriate Bible passage concluded by an opening prayer. Including a Scripture passage is particularly effective because grace is given when God's Word is read.²

The second step is the **Proclamation**, which is the announcement of the truth to be examined, learned and assimilated. One brief statement, stated boldly and clearly gives the overall thesis statement for the session. The truth of the Faith is rolled out right in front for everyone to hear. The purpose of this step is to clearly proclaim the truth to be taught. It does not take long at all, but following a well-crafted proclamation, everything else follows more closely. It's like saying, "This is what we are learning today." When children, young people, or adults leave your classroom or other setting, they know what the key point of what they learned! Therefore, the announcement must not be ambiguous or delivered as an apology. This is the central step of the method. All of the other steps come to relate to this one. Jesus made proclamations frequently: "I am the Bread of Life. . . if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:48, 51b).

¹ The five step teaching process is based upon The "Ecclesial Method" from the book, *The Mystery We Proclaim* by Msgr. Francis Kelly (Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization)

² Pertinent Scripture passages can be found in the Diocesan Religion Curriculum for each grade level and referenced according to a doctrine, for a specific textbook and chapter by the Sequence Charts

A proclamation about Baptism for the lower grades might sound like this: “In Baptism, we become a child of God.” For the upper grades, a proclamation about Baptism could be “In the Sacrament of Baptism, we receive sanctifying grace, a participation in God’s life.”

Before moving into the next step, it is essential that the catechist is clear about what the students know and don’t know about the doctrine being taught. A few probing questions answered briefly by the students will help to know what can be summarized and then where to begin with the actual explanation.

The third step is the **Explanation**, which fleshes out what was said in the Proclamation. This stage of the teaching provides the opportunity to examine closely this "good news" in greater depth. The explanation is to present the student with three or four essentials, the keys that will help the student to receive a clear and complete grasp of the doctrine. These main points will help to clarify the “*identity*” of this doctrine. The *Catechism* assists us to pinpoint these essentials that will answer the question “What is this doctrine?” We find these keys through subheadings and the use of italics as well as referring to the *Compendium*, which provides us with the fundamental questions related to the specific doctrine.

The essentials will also help to spell out the “*meaning*” of the doctrine. This key point(s) will answer the question “Why do we need this doctrine?” and “How does this doctrine relate to other things in the faith, especially more foundational truths?” (see below) The essentials are to be crafted in order to break open the doctrine and are geared toward the specific audience that you are teaching. The essentials and corresponding explanation are to honestly address students' questions and doubts. The important thing is to explain the truth well but in simple points they can remember, so that even if the truth reaches to the heights of transcendence it is clear, reasonable and attractive. Truth, clearly explained, does not insult intelligence. Rather, it informs and inspires the heart to deeper conviction and conversion.

During the time of explanation, it is also vital for students to understand that doctrine is personal, because the truths of the Faith lead us to know and love the Persons of the Trinity. Living the Faith is also personal because it involves responses and activities between the Blessed Trinity, angels, men, women and children. In the *Catechism*, we see four themes or foundational personal realities that permeate every page.³ These foundational truths are:

- 1) the Blessed Trinity
- 2) Jesus Christ
- 3) the Paschal Mystery handed on in the Church by the Holy Spirit
- 4) the dignity of the human person.

Allowing students to see that doctrine is personal is accomplished by organizing each teaching around the foundational truths of the Faith. A teaching on the Sacraments, for example, can be connected to the foundational truths in a very short and simple way that makes the explanation come alive. 1) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has a gracious plan for each person. This plan is for union with God. 2) We separated ourselves through the Original Sin. 3) Jesus established the Catholic Church and instituted the seven Sacraments so we could be reunited

³ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Craft of Catechesis*, Petroc Willey, Pierre de Cointet, Barbara Morgan, Ignatius Press.

with God. 4) This re-union was made possible through Jesus' death, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven, which is the Paschal Mystery. 5) The Paschal Mystery is handed on in the Church through the Sacraments by the work of the Holy Spirit. 6) Each person is able to receive and cooperate with God's grace. 7) The fact that God gives Himself to us in this way demonstrates our great dignity.

The faith lesson that is being explained should also connect the doctrine to the other three pillars of the Catechism, linking the four aspects of the Christian life. These four pillars of the Catechism are:

- 1) Creed - what we believe
- 2) Sacraments - how we worship God.
- 3) Life in Christ - how we respond to God's love by the way that we live - also known as the moral life
- 4) Prayer - our relationship with God.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* helps us connect the pillars through the crossreferencing of paragraph numbers found in the margins. In making these connections, students and adults are able to see the Faith as a unified whole. The truths of the Faith are like a symphony with four connected movements. While there are distinct parts, they are united, reflecting God Who is three-in-one.

The fourth step is the **Application and Appropriation into Life**. Even if the proclamation was just right and the teaching was superb, if the young people do not have the chance to specifically apply this truth to their life by making a response of faith, the session has little value. Appropriating this truth into their life is necessary because conversion is the point of the process. Conversion involves a response, a change of heart in order to follow Christ more closely. Note: Msgr. Kelly, the author of the book which elucidates this method of teaching says that we should not teach the lesson if we do not include an application to life for the participants.

Having a classroom discussion, "Praying with Scripture" (*Lectio Divina*) as promoted by the Diocese, or breaking up in small groups with well-crafted questions are good ways to draw forth faith responses that help students respond to God's grace, integrating the teaching into their lives. If the teaching was on faith, after a basic question such as "What is faith?" other questions could include "How can we increase our faith?" "How can we lose our faith?" One of the last questions could be "How is God calling you to respond to His grace and deepen your faith?" We need to allow time for a response to the teaching. Applying this truth to their life has to happen because conversion- a change of heart in order to follow Christ more closely - is the goal of teaching the Faith.

The other benefit of the application step is to help you to keep a pulse on the spiritual life of this particular group. It is necessary to know if each person has accepted or is not yet ready to embrace this teaching. This can also be a gauge to determine if the teachings are being presented in a simple way that is being understood.

The Application step allows the earlier steps to bear fruit. It should also be focused to enlighten the young peoples' experience, or to understand better the truth of the lesson: for example, to

deepen their love for Mary (or begin to let go of their resistance to her). Jesus used direct questions with His followers. After speaking about the Bread of Life, many followers left. Jesus asked Peter if he was going to leave Him. Peter responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life" (John 6:68).

Before the final step, it is crucial that there be some type of evaluation to assure that the students grasped the meaning of the teaching. Handing on the Faith is a matter of life and death, literally! Therefore, it cannot be left to chance whether the children, young people, and adults really understood and committed to this truth.

The final step is the closing **Celebration**. In this step, we are given a chance to respond in faith with the community. The point of the closing prayer is to thank God for what He has done for us. In other words, it gives us an opportunity to express our gratitude for God's love, expressed so clearly in this particular teaching. This celebration of thanksgiving and praise invites each person to respond to the grace that God was giving them while they explored His truth. For example, a lesson on Mary could end with the Litany of Loretto, the Memorare, or a decade of the Rosary.

The five-step process of **Preparation, Proclamation, Explanation, Application and Celebration** imitates God's manner of leading us to Himself. As well, the five steps produce a catechesis that faithfully teaches the truth, but also changes hearts. Please note that the simple lesson plan format including the five-step process that is included with this article can be duplicated for use in weekly planning.