

“Pastor’s Perspective”

As the pastor of a small parish, I rely on our part-time director of religious education to organize our program, recruit catechists, train them, and set a vision for the many ways we educate the members of our parish from childhood through adulthood. I try to support her personally and the program in general.

No priest can spend all the time in religious education that he, parents, kids and parishioners would like. We need to devote time to other important needs in the parish – as well as to our own refreshment through prayer and relaxation.

So I set some goals for myself during the course of the year to see that I promote and support education as much as I can. Here are some things I do. It’s not a perfect list, but it might help you think about ways a priest can stay actively involved in religious formation in a parish community.

- 1. Catechist meetings. A few times a year I’ll try to pop in at the beginning of a catechist meeting. I’ll say an opening prayer. If food is offered, I’ll fill up a plate. I don’t stay long – just a few minutes. I want to be there to express my thanks and to help keep the vision on track.**
- 2. Greeting the kids. I’m not always available when religious education for children is happening, but occasionally I like to be on hand as the kids are arriving. It gives me a chance to greet them and their parents. Sometimes I have an unplanned conversation with a parent that leads to some valuable pastoral information, allowing me to follow up with special care for that family.**
- 3. Parent sacramental preparation sessions. I like to have one session each with the parents who are preparing their children for first confession and first communion. That way I can interact with them, thank them for handing on the faith, explain things from my perspective, and hear things from theirs. I want them to deepen their own appreciation of these sacraments and to know that I value what they do.**
- 4. Confirmation preparation session. I like to lead at least one session for the kids preparing for confirmation. Usually they want me to explain what confirmation is, but I think it could also be worthwhile to do some scripture study and faith sharing with them – anything to help them prepare for receiving this sacrament.**
- 5. Meetings of baptism and marriage preparation couples. Once a year I like to get together with the couples who prepare engaged couples for marriage, and who are preparing parents for the baptism of their children. If possible, we do this over a**

meal. I find that they have a lot to share with one another – and with me. I review a few of my preferences with them, and they tell me how the ministry is going. These people usually have a lively faith that impels their spirit of service, and it nourishes my faith just to be with them.

6. Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. I like to spend some time with those being formed to join the Catholic Church. I want to know their names and something of their story. I'll lead an occasional session, be available for individual meetings with them, and preside for the various rites of initiation.
7. Adult education. I like to lead two or three adult education sessions every year, and we invite someone else to lead a few more. I try to attend the ones I don't lead – again to give my support to the program.
8. Catechist appreciation dinner. Our director of religious education is a wonderful cook, and she hosts a dinner for catechists at the end of the year. I want her to schedule the date around my calendar so that I can come – partly because I want the catechists to know how much I value their time and talent, and – I admit it – partly because the food is always good.

Even in a small parish like mine, it's hard to find time to do everything I'd like to do. So it helps me if I plan out these dates in advance with our director of religious education. We work through my schedule, and I put a hold on the dates and times that allow me to help out.

Religious education wouldn't happen here without our director, but I want to give my support whenever I can. It reminds me not to take education for granted.

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