

# Early Childhood Religious Education

## Sharing the Joy of the Gospel with Young Learners

by Dr. Joseph D. White

### Why Early Childhood is Important

#### Attachment to Jesus and the Church

- Many adults in the US have little attachment to their faith. (53% of US adults have left the faith of their childhood at some point; 9% leave and return)
- Is there a “God Gene”?
- The development of attachment

#### Six Steps to Success –

##### #1: Focus on Jesus and the Church

- Pope Francis: “In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal.” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 164).
- “The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ”. (*GDC*, 236).
- “Catechesis initiates them in knowledge of faith and apprenticeship in the Christian life.” (*GDC*, 56).

##### #2: Use Active Learning Approaches, Including Music and Child Directed Activities

- Young children are concrete learners.
- The importance of hands-on learning
- Our Faith has a rich history of multisensory catechesis and worship.

#### Six Tasks of Catechesis (*GDC*, *NDC*)

- **Promoting knowledge of the faith**
- **Liturgical education**
- **Moral Formation**
- **Teaching to pray**
- **Education for community life**
- **Missionary initiation**

Knowledge of the Faith – interactive stories, object lessons, drama, music

## Trinity Song

**We believe in one God, one God, one God;**

**We believe in one God -- Father, Son and Spirit.**

- **God the Father made us all, made us all, made us all; God the Father made us all -- the earth and all that's in it.**
- **God the Son is Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ. God the Son is Jesus Christ; He came to show us love.**
- **God the Spirit helps us grow, helps us grow, helps us grow. God the Spirit helps us grow and learn the way of love.**

Liturgical Education (hands-on sacramental education through props and role play, vessels and vestments classroom altar).

SONG: Parts of the Mass

### Chorus

This is the way we worship God, worship God, worship God.

This is the way we worship God when we go to Mass.

### Vs.1

First is the Liturgy of the Word, of the Word, of the Word.

And in the Liturgy of the Word, God speaks to us in Scripture.

### Vs.2

The Liturgy of the Eucharist, Eucharist, Eucharist,

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is our family meal.

### Moral Formation

- **Group rules/guidelines**
  - Clear (again, know the developmental level)
  - Concise
  - Positively phrased
  - Posted
  - Assertively stated
  - Backed up by action
- **Use of Everyday situations**

### Teaching to Pray

- **Prayer pillowcases**
- **Group prayer in sacred space**
- **Rosary Readiness chaplets**
- **Music and movement**

### MAKE-YOUR-OWN PRAYER SPACE

Materials needed:

- White paper
- Assorted arts and crafts supplies (washable markers, crayons, paints, watercolors, sequins)
- Paper towel rolls (2 for each child), toilet paper rolls (2 for each child)
- Dried or artificial flowers
- Glue
- 8 ½ x 11 cardboard base

God is Listening  
(Tune of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star)

**God is listening when I pray,  
I can talk to him each day.  
Praise him for how great he is,  
Thank him for the things he does.  
Ask for help with what I do,  
And pray for all who need him, too.**

Education for Community Life

- **Classroom rules**
- **Group interactions coached by religion teacher**
- **Discussion and role play of everyday situations**
- **How Can I Help?**

Missionary Initiation

- **Ask Me! Questions**
- **Beginning to learn about other cultures (saints from around the world, etc.)**
- **Meaningful arts and crafts**

The World's Greatest Gift

Materials Needed:

- Tiny box with a lid, one for each child
- Popsicle stick cut in half, one for each child
- Hay or shredded paper
- Gift bow for each child

Scissors

Glue

Markers

### #3: Use Ritual

Positive effects of ritual

- Sense of security
- Bonding with others
- Behavioral expectations/ease of transition

### #4: Plan Ahead

Arrange the space to be

- Inviting
- Interesting, but not cluttered
- Functional

Be Proactive

- Forbidden objects put away
- Activity supplies ready
- Participant proximity to teacher and others

### #5: Involve Families

- Communicate with families
- Help them encounter Christ in family life
- Provide information about how children this age understand this concept
- Recommend prayers and simple activities families can use

### #6: Be Joyful

- “A Christian is never bored or sad. Rather, the one who loves Christ is full of joy and radiates joy” –Pope Francis (via Twitter on 6/30/2013)
- Joy is the natural disposition of the young child
- They need to know that the Church is a happy and welcoming place.

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