

## 4. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS encourage and teach devotion to Mary and the saints.

We live in an age in which it can seem that there is a lack of heroes. But this is far from true! Our faith has thousands of saints (even just counting the *canonized* saints) who provide us with hope, in no small part because of their great variety. We can all find a saint for ourselves. Saints come in all shapes, sizes, races, ethnicities, personality types, states of life, and ages. But they have certain things in common: They are Eucharistic people, devotees of the Sacrament of Penance, and faithful to the Magisterium and her teachings. And they have a deep devotion to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother.



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## 3. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS love their students in a Christlike manner, pray for them, and teach for lifelong conversion.

A former professor of mine used to tell her students, “Pray to have a heart for your students.” We must pray both *with* our students and *for* our students. While discipline may be necessary if learning is to take place, so are patience and the consistent practice of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. Outstanding catechists inspire their students to want to be great. Let us convey to them their great dignity as sons and daughters of the Father, made in his image, and that they must be open to human life and not live beneath that dignity. Let us teach them the beauty of being in sanctifying grace and the limitless depths of God’s mercy in response to sin. As St. John Bosco taught, let us provide our students with opportunities for grace. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is particularly important here. One of the terms for this sacrament is the Sacrament of Conversion. Every time we make a good confession, we come to deeper conversion.

## 2. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS are Trinitarian in their catechesis.

There is one God. There is only one God. There is no other God except God. To this absolutely fundamental truth, we add this: The One God is Three Divine Persons. Outstanding catechists are caught up in wonder and awe at the fact that God is Three Persons and that we are called into relationship with our Trinitarian God. Well-formed catechists are sure to teach that all three of the Divine Persons pre-exist creation, that the Father has always had a Son, and that the Father and the Son have always breathed forth their Spirit. They make it clear that Jesus did not start to exist when Mary conceived him in her womb and that Jesus will never cease to be human. At the same time, they make it clear that Jesus is not a human person and that “in their joint mission, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct but inseparable” (CCC 689). The Trinity is a mystery that must be taught.



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## 1. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS know that, to form saints, we ourselves must become saints.

There is a Latin maxim, *Nemo dat quod non habet*, which means: “No one gives what he or she doesn’t have.” If there is any situation in which it is true that the medium is the message, it is that of the catechist in relation to his or her students. Outstanding catechists have a love for that which is most distinctively Catholic: participation in the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Holy Eucharist; love for the Communion of Saints, especially for the Holy Mother; love for the entire Church, and an exceptional love for the pope, the diocesan bishop, priests, and deacons.

## Additional Resources

*Be an Amazing Catechist*, Lisa Mladinich (Our Sunday Visitor, 2010).

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

*Mini Retreats for Meaningful Living (DVD): Catechists: God’s Call to Speak about Our Faith*, Fr. Joe Kempf (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

*Teaching Catholic Kids* online resources, TeachingCatholicKids.com.

*The Way God Teaches: A Divine Pedagogy Handbook: Keeping Kid’s Attention*, Joseph D. White, PhD (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

*The Way God Teaches: Catechesis and the Divine Pedagogy*, Joseph D. White, PhD (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

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TOP TEN WAYS

to be an  
**OUTSTANDING  
CATECHIST**



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There is no one way, no singular method, by which to catechize effectively. That said, there are common threads that are consistent with excellent catechesis. In his September 29, 2013, homily to catechists, Pope Francis reminds us to keep the focus on God:

*A catechist is a Christian who puts this remembrance at the service of proclamation, not to seem important, not to talk about himself or herself, but to talk about God, about his love and his fidelity. To talk about and to pass down all that God has revealed, his teaching in its totality, neither trimming it down nor adding on to it.*

Here the Holy Father is providing a recipe for certain characteristics fundamental to catechists bearing good fruit for the Lord by being authentic, humble, and by handing on the Faith in all its beauty. It is a prescription for being an outstanding catechist!

Catechists are called to help others learn the faith, love the faith, become holy, and get to heaven.

## 10. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS have a sense of humor.

We should take God very seriously, but not take ourselves too seriously. Good catechists help their students to be at ease by pointing out the humor in life and themselves. The willingness to laugh at oneself is a sign of humility. And what virtue is more attractive than humility? A sense of humor helps us to know our limitations, to realize that, while what we do in catechesis is important, there is still only one Savior, and we're not him!



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## 9. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS take into account the particular needs of their students.

We must be practical when teaching. Is the room too hot, too cold? Is the seating conducive to learning? Do we have students with particular learning difficulties or special needs? If so, are we working together with their parents or guardians to try to address their needs? Is the reading material age-appropriate and pedagogically sound? We are not robots and neither are our students. Taking into account the variety of students' needs, together with the classroom environment, helps make learning more possible, effective, and enjoyable.

## 8. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS prepare, prepare, prepare.

Outstanding catechists carefully prepare through the use of well-thought-out lesson plans and curriculum



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support materials. They also make use of quality catechetical resources: They stay “soaked in Scripture,” make frequent use of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and make appropriate use of resources such as the *Compendium of the Catechism*, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, *YOUCAT*, etc. The point is that outstanding catechists, like outstanding athletes, musicians, carpenters — outstanding anything — set themselves apart through a terrific work ethic (and, of course, are always aided by God's grace).

## 7. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS teach that God is truth and God is love.

Love and Truth are inseparable. Far too often we hear, “All we need is love.” In a certain sense, this is true — all we do need is love! But this maxim presupposes a highly developed understanding of what love is. Love is a mountain that must be climbed. The steps that lead up the mountain are the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church. The Scriptures are full of admonitions such as this one: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). Love is not in opposition to Law. Indeed, love is the fulfillment of the Law. If a Catholic were to say, “I love God, so I don't have to go to Mass,” that person is in serious error. An outstanding catechist is prepared to counter this sentiment with sound teaching and good humor.



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## 6. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS instruct their students in the art of prayer.

There is a hierarchy to teaching Catholic prayer. We begin by teaching liturgical prayer, especially the greatest of all prayers, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Participation in the Mass is both the greatest privilege we can partake in on this earth,



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as well as an obligation we owe to God. Next, our students also need to learn and memorize basic

Catholic prayers. And, let's not forget about devotional prayer. Devotions such as Eucharistic Adoration, the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Advent wreath devotions, and the Divine Mercy Chaplet have the power to stoke within our souls the desire for encounter with the living God.

## 5. OUTSTANDING CATECHISTS teach the beauty, grandeur, and incarnational nature of the Catholic faith.

We are not pure spirits, but body-soul composites. Jesus knows of what we're made. In his goodness he established the Catholic faith as a religion of spirit and flesh. We receive grace and are drawn to God through truth, beauty, and goodness. So Jesus instituted sacraments as outward signs — see-able, hear-able, taste-able, smell-able, touch-able — that give us grace, which can be neither seen, heard, tasted, smelled, nor touched! Following this “incarnational principle,” outstanding catechists incorporate various elements that appeal to the senses: among them beautiful (and sacred) art, beautiful (and sacred) music, periods of silence, and more. Truth, beauty, goodness...they resonate with us because they are in accord with what God designs us for — namely, himself.



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