

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility

Catechetical Session Elementary School Children Lesson Plan A

Theme: The Call to Faithful Citizenship



Materials Needed

- Newsprint (or dry erase board) and markers. You may want to pre-write the quotes from Faithful Citizenship on newsprint.
- Bible, with enthrone ment and candle, if possible

Gathering

The first purpose of the opening movement of each session is to establish a sense of welcome and hospitality. The second purpose is to begin the session with the child's human experience, i.e. the child's "story." Located prominently in the room should be an enthrone ment of the Bible, with candle. Gather around the Word for prayer.

Open the session with a reminder to the children that we are all followers of Jesus Christ. As disciples, the Church also wants us to be good citizens. Write the word, citizen on blackboard or newsprint.

- What is a citizen? (*Let the children talk about what they already know. Add information, if needed.*)

A citizen is a person who belongs to a town, city, or country. Ask the children to talk about their citizenship. Be aware of children who may be citizens of countries other than the United States.

Have the children sit in a circle and respond to the following:

- Stand up if you are a follower, a disciple, of Jesus. (Afterwards, have children sit).
- Stand up if you are a member of the Catholic Church.
- Stand up if you are a citizen and live in (Name your town or city and the names surrounding towns.) Continue until all have named their local citizenship.
- Stand up if you are a citizen of the United States of America.
- Stand up if you are a citizen of Mexico. Of Canada. Of (name a country or countries based on your student population).

- Stand up if you are a citizen of the world!

Brainstorm on a piece of newsprint, "Ways to Be a Good Disciple." (For example, "Loving God," "Praying," "Treating Other Kindly." Etc.) Then, brainstorm "Ways to Be a Good Citizen." (For example, "Vote" or "Work to make your community better") Compare and contrast the two. Make connections between being a good disciple and being a good citizen.

Opening Prayer

Gather around the Word to pray a simple opening prayer and proclaim the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Loving Father, we thank you for calling us to be disciples of your Son, Jesus Christ. Spirit that guides us, help us to be faithful disciples and faithful citizens of _____ (name your city or state) ____.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Students are seated. Catechist takes Bible from enthronement and proclaims reading. Be sure reading is marked in advance.

Scripture Reading & Faith Sharing

The catechist makes the transition to this movement by describing that Jesus teaches us how to be good disciples and good citizens. He tells us we have to "love one another." Prior to proclaiming the reading the catechist may wish to prepare the children for some of the strong language in this passage, e.g. hate and murder. However, avoid too much "explaining" before the proclamation.

Proclaim the reading from Mark 12:28-34 (*Note: The same reading used in the Adult Small Faith Community Sharing and the High School Lesson Plan so that the sessions can be intergenerational, if desired*):

A reading from the Gospel of Mark...

After the reading a brief period of silence follows. Then, the catechist asks the children these or similar questions:

- What happened in this reading?
- What was the scribe's question?
- What did Jesus say are the two most important commandments?

After the children's initial response, read the reading again, asking the children to listen to what Jesus says about loving others.

A reading from the Gospel of Mark...

- Who is your neighbor? Is Jesus talking just about the people who live next door, or about all people?
- Is it harder to love God, or to love other people?
- Can you tell me examples of how people sometimes hurt each other, instead of love each other?
- What are ways that you show other people you love them?
- What are ways you show God that you love him?
- Does loving people help us to love God better?
- Does loving God help us love people better?

Faithful Citizenship Reading and Discussion

The catechist makes a transition from reflection on the Scripture to discussion on the teaching of the Church. Prior to beginning this segment, find out how much your students know about the upcoming presidential election, as well as any local elections.

- Our country is having an important election this year. Who knows what an election is?
- What can you tell me about the election?

Given this is an election year, the Church is especially concerned about good and faithful citizenship.

- What does faithful mean?
- What does citizenship mean?

The bishops of the United States have written a document that emphasizes the importance of being a good citizen. We bring our faith to every part of our lives, so we call ourselves “faithful citizens.” In the scripture reading, we learned that loving other people is one of the most important commandments. As citizens, we have to help take care of other people. We also have to help our leaders make good laws that help our neighbors who are in need.

An important part of being a faithful citizen is voting. Although you are not old enough to vote, you are still a citizen. Good citizens care about the community and the world. Good citizens care about others.

- What are some ways that you care about others?
- Name some people in our community and in our world who need our love and concern.

The Church teaches that good citizens are concerned about:

- Human dignity. Protecting human life, especially unborn children.

- Peace and the common good. Making our world better for all people.
- The poor. Reducing poverty and sharing our wealth with those who are poor, particularly children.
- What do elections have to do with loving our neighbor?

The Church also says (*write this quote on newsprint or blackboard*):

“Participation in political life in light of fundamental moral principles is an essential duty for every Catholic and all people of good will.”

- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility* (no. 57)

- What are principles?
- What principles does the Church teach us? (If the students need help, ask, “What does the Church teach us about human life? About how we should act toward others? Does every person have value? Why?)

So, we have to make choices based on principles – on what we believe and are taught.

- What choices do you have to make every day?
- How can what the Church teaches help you?

“We encourage *all citizens*, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity meaningfully to participate *in building the culture of life*.”

- USCCB, *Living the Gospel Life: A Challenge to American Catholics* (no. 34)

The quote says that “all citizens” should help make the world better – not just adults.

- Do children's voices matter? Why or why not?
- To build the "culture of life" means that we work to build up life, rather than tear it down. For example, we treat others with respect rather than with "put-downs." We take care of our bodies. We take care of our environment. We defend those whose lives are at risk. What are ways you build up life?

Closing Prayer

Return to the adult gathering or return to the prayer circle. If praying in the classroom, refer to the list on newsprint.

Using the list of "Ways to Be a Good Disciple" and "Ways to Be a Good Citizen," make a litany with the response being, "Lord, hear our prayer." Catechist leads the litany using examples the children gave. For example:

- Help us to share with others as Jesus did. We pray to the Lord...
- Help us to respect all people like Jesus did. We pray to the Lord...
- Help us be good citizens by picking up our trash. We pray to the Lord...

- Help us be good citizens speaking up for the weak and the poor. We pray to the Lord...
- Gathering our prayers into one, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us. Our Father...