

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

Catechetical Session Elementary School Children Lesson Plan B

Theme: Forming Consciences

Materials Needed

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



Gathering

The first purpose of the opening 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." A Bible should be enthroned prominently in the room. Gather around the Word for prayer.

Begin the session by taking out the compass. Tell the children you have brought a special instrument today for them to look at. Say that you will talk more about the special instrument later, but for now, you want them to take turns looking at it, passing it around quietly, without talking.

Opening Prayer

**Let us pray.
Spirit of God,
We thank you for making a home in our hearts.
Help us to recognize your presence in us.
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

Proclaim the reading (Romans 2:14-16):

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans...

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

- What did you hear in the reading?

After the children's initial response, read the reading again.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans...

- What did you hear in the reading? (*You might have to re-read parts of the reading to help children pick up on the mention of "law"*).
- What are examples of laws that you know of? (*Students will probably mention official laws in their city or classroom rules.*)
- Are there other types of laws or rules you can think of? Are there rules within your family? Can you name any rules that God gives us in the Bible?

Explain that Paul is talking about the law written on our hearts by God. Ask:

- Does anyone know what we call the law that is written on our hearts?

If no one knows, explain that the law that God writes on our heart is called "conscience." Write the word on the board or paper.

Now bring out the compass that you passed around in the beginning of the class. Ask:

- Does anyone know what this is?

If someone knows, let them explain what it is. You may have to help, explaining that no matter what direction you stand, the compass always points north. It is an instrument to help us find our way or the direction we should go. Explain that conscience, or the law God puts on our hearts, is like a compass. It helps us make the right decisions when we feel confused or when we aren't sure what to do.

- Ask if anyone can share an example of a time that they felt like "the law in their heart" was telling them what to do."

If they need prompting, ask if someone ever found something that wasn't theirs, or if they saw someone younger get hurt.

Faithful Citizenship Reading and Discussion

The catechist makes a transition from reflection on the Scripture to discussion on the teaching of the Church, quoting from Faithful Citizenship in paragraph 17:

[C]onscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil.

Ask the children:

- What is conscience?
- Do you automatically know what is right and wrong when you are born, or do you have to learn this?

Explain that people have to learn how to listen to their consciences.

- How did you learn what is right and wrong?

Help the students understand that a person's conscience is formed over time. What we learn in religion classes at church or school helps us form our consciences. Reading the Bible helps us know what is right and wrong – for example, the Bible tells us we must care for the weak and vulnerable around us. Trusted adults like parents and teachers help teach us about the Bible and what the Church says, and how to pray and reflect. This all helps us form their consciences.

Finally, help the children see the link between individual choices and the public realm by asking:

- How do the leaders that represent you in government know what is right and wrong?
- What are examples of things that a political leader should be doing, if they listen to their consciences?

Explain that we all are called to listen to our own consciences and to help our leaders make decisions that reflect what we believe. For example, we should remind our leaders that they should be trying to protect the poor and vulnerable.

Closing Prayer

Return to the adult gathering or return to the prayer circle.

Return to the compass used in the opening exercise. Respectfully place the compass in the middle of your prayer space near the Bible. After all have gathered in silence, proclaim the reading.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans... (Romans 2:14-16).

After reading, allow for a few moments of silence. Then close in prayer:

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, may your voice in our hearts and the teaching of our parents and teachers help us to form our consciences and live as your faithful citizens.

We ask this in the name of Jesus your Son and through the power of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.