

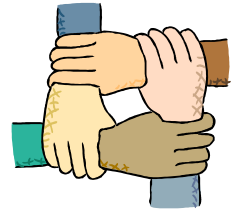
# Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility

## Catechetical Session Elementary School Children Lesson Plan F

### Theme: Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

#### 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.
- Paper and crayons or markers, if asking the children to draw for the opening activity.



#### 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." A Bible should be enthroned prominently in the room. Gather around the Word for prayer.*

Begin by using the image of table: "Who has a place at the table of life?" Ask the children to close their eyes and imagine a grand dinner table which has been set for a feast. Give them quiet time to imagine the picture in their minds, or you could ask them to draw a picture of who is around their table.

- Who is present at the table? Describe the people.

Allow time for the children to name and describe the people who are present at their table. Next, ask the children if anyone has room at their table for strangers, for a person who is hungry, for people who are thirsty or sick?

Jesus tells us that we are to welcome those who are strangers, feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. And, Jesus says even more! Let's pray then listen to a gospel reading.

#### Opening Prayer

**Let us pray.**

**Good and caring Father, you give us all that we have. Spirit of Compassion, help us**

**to share what we have with others. Help us to work to end poverty and promote justice and peace by speaking up for those in need in our community, our nation, and our world. 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 (Matthew 25:31-46):

### **A reading from the Gospel of Matthew...**

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

- What did you hear Jesus saying in the reading?
- What were you surprised to hear?

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

### **A reading from the Gospel of Matthew...**

- What is Jesus trying to teach us in this story?
- Is this teaching hard to follow? Why or why not?
- In whom is Jesus present in your community today?
- Name a time when "Jesus" was hungry and you fed him? Or, thirsty and you gave him drink? Or, a stranger and you welcomed him? Or, sick and you visited him?

## **Faithful Citizenship Reading and Discussion**

*The catechist makes a transition from reflection on the Scripture to discussion on the teaching of the Church.*

Jesus had a special love for people who were hungry or thirsty or sick or in prison. He had a special love for the poor and the weak. The Church continues the teachings of Jesus. The Church teaches that we must help those who are poor and weak.

Poor people have a special place in the Church. The bishops write: "While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern" (*Faithful Citizenship*, no. 50). We should put the needs of the poor first.

- What does it mean to put the needs of the poor first?

[Note: If the students have questions about why we care especially for those who are poor and vulnerable (don't we care for all God's children?), it may help to ask them to imagine a parent walking with two children along a beach. If one child gets swept into the surf, will the parent treat both children the same? Or, for children who may not have experienced a beach: If a parent is walking with two children on the sidewalk and one falls and skins his knee and is bleeding, will the parent treat both children the same? No, the parent responds in special ways to the child whose needs are greatest, even though the parent loves both children. In the same way, our brothers and sisters whose needs are greatest, those who are poor and vulnerable, have a special claim on our concern and attention.]

The Church also tells us that when we care for the poor we are being not just good disciples, but good citizens. The leaders of our cities, towns and country must also show concern for the poor (Faithful Citizenship, no. 47).

The Bible and the teachings of the Church tell us we must put our love into action. This means we must do something to help the poor (Faithful Citizenship no. 51).

- What can we do to show we care for the poor?
- What can the leaders of our cities and our country do?

After the discussion, talk with the children about the concrete steps they can take to care for the poor. As a group, develop a plan for how your class will put the needs of the poor first. Here are a few examples:

- Visit the web sites of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/edcenter/index.shtml>) or Bread for the World ([www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)). The Catholic Campaign for Human Development is a campaign run by USCCB, the organization of the bishops of the United States, who often speak out on issues affecting the poor and vulnerable. Bread is a Christian citizen movement seeking justice for the world's hungry people by lobbying our nation's decision makers. Both sites contain information and ideas for actions.
- Organize families to meet on a Saturday morning to work together with the local St. Vincent de Paul chapter or local food pantry. Gather afterward for lunch, prayer and reflection.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen and then participate in a Hunger Walk.
- Take the Food Solidarity Challenge on USCCB's website.
- Bring in canned goods. Have a prayer, blessing and discussion before delivering to the local food pantry.
- Establish a "pen pal" relationship with a parish religious education class or a school in another country.

- Collect clothing and toys for children of the same age—perhaps at a time other than Christmas—and donate them to a local organization serving low-income children.
- Contact the local Children's Hospital to ask what your class could do to be of service to hospitalized children. Some hospitals accept donations of new toys or books. (Remember the gospel of Matthew 25: 36. Discuss with students that although these children may or may not be "poor," they are "the vulnerable.")
- Ask your parish Christian Service Coordinator how your class can be of service to the poor.
- Organize families to participate in a "lobby night" or pro-life march if one is being planned by your diocese or state Catholic conference.
- Invite a local legislator to the class to talk about how he or she works to make sure the needs of the poor and vulnerable are addressed.

### **Closing Prayer**

*Return to the adult gathering or return to the prayer circle. Recall the table image used in the opening exercise. Bring the children together and quiet them for prayer.*

- Ask them to remember the table that they pictured in their minds earlier.
- Remember the people who were there.
- Remember the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the poor who were not there at first. Picture them now at your table.

**Let us pray.**

**Good and caring Father, thank you for all you have given to us.**

**We pray now for those who are poor and sick.**

**We pray for all those we have now invited to our tables.**

**Help us to follow your teachings by helping those in need and working for justice and peace.**

**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.**