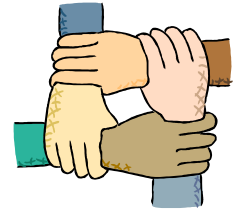


Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility

Catechetical Session Junior/ Senior High School Lesson Plan F



Theme: Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

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 young person's human experience, i.e. her/his "story." A Bible should be enthroned prominently in the room. Gather around Word for prayer.

Begin by using the image of a table: Who has a place at the table of life? Ask the young people to close their eyes and imagine a grand banquet table that has been set for a feast. Give them quiet time to imagine the picture in their minds.

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

Allow time for each person to name and describe some of the people who are present at the table. Next, ask if anyone has room at their table for prisoners, or strangers, or the sick, or for those who are hungry or homeless?

Jesus tells us that we are to welcome those who are strangers, feed the hungry, visit prisoners and those who are the sick. And, Jesus says even more! Let's pray and 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 those who are less fortunate. Help us also to work to end poverty and to promote justice in our world 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 these or similar questions:

- What did you hear Jesus saying in the reading?
- What was surprising?

After the initial response, read the reading again.

A reading from the Gospel of Mathew...

Then ask the following:

- What is Jesus trying to teach us in this story?
- Is this teaching hard to follow? Why or why not?
- 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?
- How does this teaching relate to our roles as faithful citizens?

Faithful Citizenship Reading and Discussion

The catechist makes a transition from reflection on the Scripture to discussion on the teaching of the Church. Several readings and related questions can be used by the catechist to explore the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable.

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.

[Note: If the young people 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? 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.]

While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern. A basic moral test for our society is how we treat the

most vulnerable in our midst. In a society marred by deepening disparities between rich and poor, Scripture gives us the story of the Last Judgment (see Mt 25:31-46) and reminds us that we will be judged by our response to the “least among us.”

- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (no. 50).

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

Pope Benedict XVI has taught that “love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to [the Church] as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel” (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 22). This preferential option for the poor and vulnerable includes all who are marginalized in our nation and beyond—unborn children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and terminally ill, and victims of injustice and oppression

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States (no. 51).

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 care for the poor.

Faithful Citizenship (no. 50) quotes the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a *preferential love* on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere. (no. 2448).”

- 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 about the concrete steps young people 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 (CCHD) at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website (www.usccb.org/cchd/) or Bread for the World (www.bread.org). The USCCB is an organization run by the bishops of the United States, who often speak out on issues affecting the poor and vulnerable. CCHD focuses on poverty in the United States. 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.
- Also visit the current Action Alerts on the USCCB website to find out about issues of current focus. Visit www.usccb.org/sdwp/takeaction.shtml and write a letter to your legislative representatives.

- Plan a "Food Fast" as a way to help those who are hungry and to heighten your solidarity with the poor. See the Catholic Relief Service website at <http://crs.org/>.
- Contact your diocesan director of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) to identify a local group working to empower low-income people. Find out how you can work with the group.
- Organize families to participate in a "lobby night" or pro-life march if one is being planned by your diocese or state Catholic conference.
- Participate in a local anti-hunger walk-a-thon.
- 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.
- Meet on a Saturday morning to work together at the local St. Vincent de Paul chapter or local food pantry.
- Bring in canned goods. Have a prayer, blessing and discussion before delivering to the local food pantry.
- 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.")
- Establish a "pen pal" relationship with a parish religious education class or youth group 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.
- Connect with an organization such as The Gabriel Project, which works with schools to raise money to bring children from developing countries to the U.S. for needed surgeries. Lesson plans and curriculum are provided to the schools to facilitate learning and solidarity. Visit: <http://www.thegabrielproject.com>.
- Contact your parish or diocesan social concerns or pro-life coordinator for additional ideas.
- See "Putting Faith into Action" for suggestions on implementing your actions plans.

Closing Prayer

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

Gather once again in the same space where the opening prayer was celebrated. Recall the table image used in the opening exercise.

- Ask the young people 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. Pray for them now.

Let us pray.

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

We pray now for those who are poor, imprisoned and sick.

Help us to follow the teaching of Jesus 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.