

Carole writes from the heart of a catechist directly to the heart of the catechist. I highly recommend that parish catechists read and share this book together.

■ **MARY JO WAGGONER, DIRECTOR**

Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry, Diocese of San Diego

Realistic yet filled with the ideal, light-hearted but profound, creative as well as doable, *Catechist 101: Wade Don't Dive* is rooted in deep reverence for the call of each catechist and insightful respect for every learner.

■ **JANET SCHAEFFLER, OP, Author, Retreat and Catechetical Presenter**

Where was this book when I started? Carole has something for everyone wading in the water of catechetical ministry.

■ **DIANE BLAIR, MAPS, Loyola Institute for Ministry Admissions and Student Services, Loyola University New Orleans**

Carole Eipers, one of the nation's leading "faith storytellers," offers here an accessible and common-sense resource that new and seasoned catechists cannot afford to be without.

■ **GERARD F. BAUMBACH Emeritus Professor, Institute for Church Life Director Emeritus of the Echo Program, University of Notre Dame**

This is a book to be read at the beginning of every catechetical year.

It provides inspiration, enthusiasm, and valuable ideas to enhance our teaching. Our students deserve it. ■ **SISTER ROSA MONIQUE PENA, OP Bilingual Catechetical Consultant, William H Sadlier Inc.**

Catechist 101 captures the essence of answering the call to be a catechist.

This is a great resource that every catechist young and old would benefit from by reading and re-reading. ■ **DAN MCGOWAN, Director of Faith Formation Resurrection Catholic Church and School, Lakeland, FL**

Carole provides practical advice and inspiring illustrations to assist catechists to swim with confidence. I would invite both new and veteran catechists to lift the cover and dive in!

■ **THOMAS P. WALTERS, PHD, Emeritus Professor of Religious Education, Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology**

Catechist 101 is filled with a variety of practical suggestions and the hope-filled encouragement needed to empower every catechist.

■ **MARGE GARBACZ Pastoral Associate/Director of Religious Education St. Symphorosa Parish, Chicago, IL**

Carole addresses the fears and questions of both new and experienced catechists in an affirming and gentle way. She makes catechesis doable.

■ **DON KURRE**, *Director of Religious Education*
Diocese of Grand Island, Nebraska

Carole weaves storytelling with practical tools to help new and seasoned catechists critically reflect on the great job they are doing.

■ **JOSÉ M. AMAYA**
Director of Faith Formation, Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

I love this book. I want to give it to all my catechists. For pastors and DREs who are looking for something that will help form and support the ministry of catechists—this is it!” ■ **FR. RON LEWINSKI**, *Pastor*
St. Mary of the Annunciation Parish, Mundelein, Illinois

Carole’s ideas and suggestions are clear, fresh, and sparkling. This book should be requirement for anyone preparing to be a catechist in a diocesan training program as well as for the seasoned catechist.

■ **FATHER MICHAEL CARRANO**, *Pastor Our Lady of Hope Parish,*
Middle Village, Queens New York

Dr. Eipers uses a gentle approach, filled with stories and analogies to share her experience and wisdom. I highly recommend this book for all catechists and Catholic school teachers. ■ **ROBERT PRAZNIK**,
Superintendent, Archdiocese of Winnipeg Catholic Schools

Carole’s analogies are right on target and speak to the heart and soul of catechetical ministry. I am going to give it to my current catechists and to those I am hoping will join our program as catechists!

■ **TERRY NAVARRO**
Pastoral Assoc./Dir. of Religious Ed , St. Mary Star of the Sea Parish

Carole has artfully woven practical advice with her own witness of faith. Both new and experienced catechists can benefit.

■ **LORI DAHLHOFF, EDD**, *Executive Director,*
NCEA Religious Education Department

Carole Eipers gives us the confidence and skill to share God with those who come to us in trust and love. Enjoy the water!

■ **FATHER TERRY JOHNSON**, *Pastor, St. Irenaeus Parish, Park Forest Illinois*



The ESSENTIAL CATECHIST'S BOOKSHELF

Catechist 101

WADE DON'T DIVE

GIVING NEW *and*
SEASONED CATECHISTS
CONFIDENCE

Carole M. Eipers, D.Min.

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An INTRODUCTION *and* INVITATION

Dear Catechist,

The word game called *Mad Libs* has been around since 1953, and in its latest morphing is into an app for smartphones. As I wrote this book for you and other catechists, I wondered what you would be thinking and feeling as you read the chapters.

Mad Libs came to mind. I thought if I wrote a story in which some of the words were missing and you could fill in the blanks, it could capture where you are at this moment in your catechetical ministry journey. So, I invite you to fill in the blanks, to tell your story as you begin this book. There will be another story—or rather, a continuation of your story—for you to complete as you finish this book.

I wrote this book while I was at the beach and so the images of learning to swim were in my mind as I thought about your beginning to be a catechist—or beginning again. Don't rush it! You don't have to "cover it all" or "finish the book" all at once. Enjoy the lessons and then the children will enjoy learning their faith and will continue to come and to learn.

So, let's wade in!

Blessings,

Carole

Mr STORY

THE _____ CATECHIST

It is now “once upon a time” and it seems it’s time to _____ . “ _____ !” I find myself exclaiming when I think about being a catechist. I am feeling _____ and _____ as I consider this responsibility. The one thing that I know is that I am _____ .

The children I will be teaching are _____ years old and they are all _____ . I worry that they might _____ .

My own faith is _____ . Sharing my faith makes me wonder if I am _____ . After all, there are others who could be catechists but they _____ .

What I need now is to _____ . And I need to learn about _____ . I hope that I will be _____ and that my students will be _____ .

And so I pray:

Dear _____ ,

I thank you for _____ . I am _____ as I prepare to be a catechist. Please give me _____ and _____ and _____ .

Help me to remember that I am _____ and that as long as I have _____ , I can do this ministry for you.

Amen.



C'mon in! The water's fine!

“No.”

When I was first asked to be a catechist, that was my immediate response. First of all, I was not even sure what a catechist was. Second, whatever it was, I was quite certain I was not up to the task. It involved children and religion, I knew; I didn't know much about either. I was, after all, only studying to be a teacher. I was, perhaps, ready to assist someone else as I began the student teaching dimension of my studies. But me—would I stand alone with students to present the truths of the Catholic faith? No.

Then my professor, Sister Mariam, made it clear that she was not really just *asking* me. This being a catechist was, in fact, part of the required student teaching experience for our degree at this Catholic college. That was how in the end I said “Yes.” Although I think I said something more like, “Okay, if I have to.”

Was your “yes” to being a catechist as reluctantly spoken as mine? Or did you say an eager “yes” because you understood what I did not think about: that this is a continuation of the “yes” of baptism?

SAYING YES ISN'T EASY

As I was preparing to write this book, I attended the baptism of Ethan Alexander, the grandson of dear friends. As we stood around the baptismal pool, Father Ron blessed the water. The blessing tells the importance of water in salvation history: at creation the Holy Spirit breathed on the waters—the waters of the great flood ending sin and bringing new life, the waters of the Red Sea being parted so that the chosen people might escape from slavery and be set free, the waters of the Jordan River in which Jesus was baptized, and the water that flowed from his side as he hung on the cross. And then the prayer says, “After his resurrection, he told his disciples, ‘Go out and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’”

I wonder if that “go out and teach” part of the prayer is why a lot of us cry when the water is poured over our heads. We are given the gift of grace. We become members of the church—and part of the church’s mission to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

I am not sure if I cried at my baptism, but I was close to tears when my first session as a catechist drew closer. Tears are sometimes another reminder of our baptism—Jesus didn’t promise an easy life; he promised a meaningful life. The truth is, I wasn’t just close to tears; I cried.

I had nightmares before that first class: I forgot to go; I was late and the kids were going wild when I arrived; I was there and no kids showed up; I was teaching and went to reach for the catechist guide, but instead of the guide there was an old, very heavy rubber tire. Maybe subconsciously that old tire symbolized a life preserver. It was there, but it would take some effort to use it!

The first class went off smoothly in spite of my fears. Then,

as one of the fourth graders, Timmy, was leaving, he quietly told me I had done pretty good and then immediately asked when the real teacher would be coming.

I was now officially a catechist—ego deflated, but intact. I could do this. More, I felt called to do this. And so you have been called. Whether it was your pastor that issued the call or the director of catechesis or a friend—it is the Lord who calls you. And he graces you for your ministry. Beyond the fundamental vocation we received in baptism, the call to be a catechist is a special vocation, one affirmed by the church. “The call to the ministry of catechist is a vocation, an interior call, the voice of the Holy Spirit.” (*National Directory for Catechesis*, p. 228; 54 B.8)

HARDLY A KNOW-IT-ALL

In one of the “007” movies, James Bond says, “I’m tempted to say yes immediately, but I think I’d maybe have a look around.” I needed to “have a look around” when, years after my first experience as a catechist, I was settled in a new place and a new parish, and again the call to be a catechist came. This time I was asked to teach a particular religion topic that I did not know very well. So I asked our catechetical leader and then our pastor and a few other catechists. I realized it’s okay not to know, not to have all the answers. I think one of the reasons—perhaps the first reason—the Lord calls us to be catechists is for our own growth in faith.

In *On Catechesis in Our Time* (*Catechesi Tradendae*) Pope John Paul II reminds us of the goal of catechesis: “The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (#5). Bishop Ramirez, retired bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico, said that the catechist is one who introduces people to Jesus Christ.

Therefore, he says, the catechist must know Jesus Christ and know the people. Jesus called you to be a catechist first so that you will grow closer to him and then so that you will help others to be his disciples.

Jesus' life was woven with water from his baptism in the Jordan to his many experiences at the Sea of Galilee. The first followers he called were fishermen and, Scripture says, he often withdrew to the sea. And he told his disciples they would be fishers of people: "catching" them, drawing them in closer.

We know the story of his baptism, when the Spirit of God came from the heavens like a dove and a voice from the heavens declared, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). When things were difficult for Jesus or when he was rejected, I wonder if he returned to the waters hoping to hear an echo of the Father's words and to feel the Spirit.

As a catechist, you will remind people that they are beloved children of God and temples of the Holy Spirit. You will be the reminder of their baptismal dignity and of God's embrace of them no matter what happens to them. That is what will "stick"—not how cleverly you taught or how many pages you covered in the text, but the knowledge, the conviction, that they are loved by God.

At Ethan's baptism, we sang the hymn "Come to the Water." The question at the end of the second verse struck me as I thought of you and all catechists: "Why should you spend your life except for the Lord?" No matter what the intervening reasons might be—it was a requirement for a degree, or your child will be in religious education this year, or the director is a friend of yours—you said yes because of the Lord. And you said yes because you know you can make a lasting difference.

THE CATECHIST'S LEGACY

It has been many years since I was a catechist for the first time. And it has been many years since I taught eighth graders at our parish and reclaimed my own confirmation. I have just recently moved back into the parish where I was a catechist for over ten years. After Mass one Sunday during Lent, Julia, the mother of one of the children I taught, approached me. “The eighth graders are going to reenact the Stations of the Cross this week. I have been working with them and I hope you can come to see them.”

And so I went to see the eighth graders present the Living Stations of the Cross. Soon after they began I realized that they were using the script that I had written thirty-five years ago. There were some alterations to the performance: they began in the back of the church rather than the whole performance happening in the sanctuary; the costumes were more elaborate than the ones Sister Carolyn, our DRE, had sewn those years ago. But the words they spoke were the words I wrote. The words they spoke were the words that came to me as I reflected on each station and put pen to paper.

It was awesome! Somehow my teaching had lived on and my retelling of Jesus' story had endured. Some of the new performers were the children of the children I had taught. I had touched a generation who were not even born when I wrote the stations. And I was reminded of all those who had taught me about Jesus: my parents, my school teachers, the catechists—from Sister Jacqueline in first grade to Sister Mary Clare in eighth grade—my friends who taught me through their example, and so many others who touched me with Jesus' message along my life's journey. I thanked God for all those catechists.

I wondered, then, what else had lasted of what I had said or

done as a catechist. I asked Jane, a former student and now a wife and mother, what she remembered. Jane said, “I remember that religion was important and that you catechists got along so well it felt like a community.”

She paused. Then she said, “Yes, it was a real faith community, and learning about our faith was a key to happiness. And all of you catechists loved us. So we knew that God loved us too.”

Jane didn't remember the book we used—though it was important for the content and to guide the learning and discussions. She didn't remember the tests we had but she does remember the prayers. Most of all, she wants her children to know what she learned: that God loves each of us and that we are a community of faith.

Those *are* the most important things. Those are the most important things that you will share as a catechist. There will be many other things you will teach about the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation and the Resurrection and Pentecost. All of your teaching will enrich the discipleship of the young people entrusted to your care. And your teaching will influence generations not yet born because you have taught their parents or grandparents.

Author Joseph Campbell wrote, “The big question is whether you are going to be able to say a hearty yes to your adventure.” You have said a “yes,” though it may have been hesitant or it may have been more generous. Now, can it be a hearty—a heart-y—yes, filled with gratitude and grace?

● *For reflection/action*

BEGINNER CATECHIST

Write down or enter on your computer/smartphone all the reasons you said yes to being a catechist. Keep this list and add to it through the year as you discover other reasons God called you to this ministry.

Choose one of the patron saints of catechists, like Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Viator, Saint Robert Bellarmine, or another, to “adopt” as your patron and to whom you will pray for the strength and wisdom you need.

SEASONED CATECHIST

Reach out to one of the new catechists and offer an idea to help her or him get started.

Contact, by e-mail or phone or prayer, one of the people who taught you the faith; express your gratitude.