

2017/18 Best Practices for Using *The Witness* as a Faith Formation Resource

Items in RED are new for 2017/18

The Faith Formation Leaders (FFL) and Catholic School Administrators (CSA) throughout the archdiocese have compiled this listing of “Best Practices.” Please review and “adapt, adopt, revise” any ideas which will assist you and the catechists/teachers in using *The Witness* as an effective catechetical formation resource.

1. In small groups such as grade level teams/units including other staff/specialists, meet weekly/periodically and share ideas found for personal spiritual growth. Garner suggestions regarding how any of the ideas/articles could/would be shared when working with students.
2. Each week a faculty member, catechist, or FFL/CSA chooses an article from the current *Witness* and leads discussion or online discussion/blog with the staff focusing on:
 - a. key issues in the article
 - b. Church doctrine/teaching in the article
 - c. how it impacts one’s adult formation
 - d. what one can personally take away from the article
 - e. how one would share the information or experience with students
3. At weekly/periodic meetings, the person/catechist assigned for prayer selects a spiritual article (if possible) to be discussed, leads the discussion, and brings any background information related to the article back to the group. If articles are appropriate for classroom, they can then be integrated into a lesson. Be sure to key into Respect Life/Social Justice (RL/SJ) articles and how the article ties into the online videos, Sunday readings, and lesson from the RL/SJ web site:
<https://www.dbqarch.org/offices/respect-life/>
4. As a faith formation tool, teachers/catechists use an article(s) each week for one’s own reflection. For upper grades, provide questions that teens can discuss concerning certain articles. For the lower grades, teachers/catechists can read an article to the students, or discuss its meaning with them. Take particular note on articles on family since one of the important Faith Formation & Education emphases is “family.”
5. Use *The Witness* as the basis for weekly/periodic faculty/staff prayer letting people know in advance the article to be used. This can lead to a deeper faith-sharing time. **Keep in mind that the Catechetical Sunday theme for this year from the USCCB is: Living as Missionary Disciples.**
6. Be sure to utilize the Disciple’s Corner, the biweekly reflection column. This column is written specifically for use as quality faith-formation.
7. At the beginning of the year, explain the various features and general content of *The Witness* to new teachers or catechists if they are not familiar with the paper. Various columnists and/or featured readings can be used to compose prayer for staff meetings. Specific articles such as Fr. Rolheiser’s column on Advent or Lent can serve as a discussion on personal preparation for the season. If catechists note their preference about a certain writer in *The Witness* (such as Rolheiser or), suggest books by this author.
8. Forward the “*Witness* Promo” to teachers and catechists each week. Suggest that they keep a journal of their reactions and reflections on articles they have read. Even consider creating a student/family blog at your school or in your faith formation program where parents and kids can post ideas or thoughts about articles, especially those related to family life.
9. Consider starting a parish blog where both the FFL and CSA can post formational ideas and suggest certain *Witness* articles for families. Have the families respond to these articles or even welcome comments about the weekly scripture or what was discussed in the homily. Consider

adding a link on the parish web site that highlights current articles that may be of interest. Make sure the blog is available to small faith formation groups, Bible study groups, mother's groups and other parish organizations.

10. All FFLs/CSAs are strongly encouraged to make reading *The Witness* a priority.
11. When distributing *The Witness*, paper clip a note with 2-3 articles that are “must reads” or make note of the “must reads” in your newsletter. Make particular note of any article or piece that ties in with the talk given by Archbishop Jackels **at the August 10 FFL/CSA Day.**
12. Use an article from *The Witness* as the theme of a formational discussion at a parish staff, faculty meeting, grade level meeting, or meeting with teachers/catechists; in other words, use an article as material for a meeting that already exists. **Look for topics that may reflect the content from this year's FFL/CSA book club book, *My Life With The Saints* by James Martin. *My Life With the Saints* is James Martin's story of how his life has been shaped by the saints of the Catholic Church. In his modern classic memoir, Martin introduces us to saints throughout history—from St. Peter to Dorothy Day, St. Francis of Assisi to Mother Teresa—and chronicles his lifelong friendships with them. *Witness* articles about the Saints articles may lead catechists/teachers to read the book themselves.**
13. Be sensitive to any articles that could be used in class or referred to in a religion class. Pay special attention to articles from the Respect Life/Social Justice program.
14. Just like young adults discuss their faith at Theology on Tap, set up a regular time in the parish for *The Witness* and coffee such as one Saturday morning a month. Many parishioners meet regularly for coffee at a local coffee shop or diner any way so encourage them to discuss *The Witness* as such gatherings. Send along *The Witness* promo ideas or other questions so there is a discussion framework.
15. Invite a pastor/PLC, pastoral associate, faith formation leader, or parishioner to lead a multi-week/mini series on an article(s). This form of adult formation requires minimal preparation for the leader. Encourage your pastor or another staff member to write about or summarize special *Witness* articles in the parish bulletin to stir interest. If you help plan parish events, you may wish to alert the speaker to the four Archdiocesan Pastoral Priorities: On-going Faith Education, Enhanced Sunday Liturgies, Stewardship and Vocations: <https://www.dbqarch.org/priorities/>
16. Encourage catechists/teachers to read some of *The Witness* on Sundays either before or after reading the Sunday paper. Setting a time aside and doing so regularly may become a weekly/periodic habit.
17. Encourage FFLs, administrators, catechists, and/or teachers to write articles that can be published in *The Witness* that deal specifically with classroom tips, teaching ideas, lesson plan suggestions, or classroom management. Encourage FFLs and principals to send in pictures with articles about items of interest. A project or event in one parish may spark the same idea for formation in another.
18. Encourage FFLs, principals, catechists, teachers and Youth Ministers to give *The Witness* subscriptions as gifts to young adults or teenagers in college.
19. If a FFL or principal knows that a person reads every evening (fiction, biographies, etc.), encourage these readers to begin their reading with one article from *The Witness*.
20. Encourage catechists and parents to download other good resources from writers in *The Witness*. Many good formational books by excellent Catholic authors are free downloads on Kindle or other e-readers.

Time Effective Uses of *The Witness* - “Time Possibilities” The ideas below do not require an additional meeting time with catechist/teachers as all the ideas can be integrated into presently scheduled activities.

21. Have a question of the week/month based upon *The Witness* posted in the catechist newsletter or teacher bulletin. Whenever possible, develop a question from the Disciple’s Corner.
22. Each week electronically send *The Witness* promo parents/guardians in you newsletters. **Here would be a good place to highlight pieces when available in the *Witness* about Beauty Alive, a new series of workshops this fall for Catholic women throughout the Archdiocese, and Beauty in Christ, the January 27, 2018 Archdiocesan Women’s Conference.**
23. Tweet a brief thought about a *Witness* article to parents, teachers or catechists. A tweet is succinct and to the point. Just say enough to generate some interest and others on Twitter may be inclined to read the article!
24. Clip pictures and articles from *The Witness* and post in a visible spot. Have a key catechist or parent assist with this project. Catechists and parents will share what they have done and encourage others to read it. Consider a *Witness* bulletin board in your school or faith formation setting where students clip articles that they think are important. You could organize a bulletin board on the four Archdiocesan Pastoral Priorities: Faith Formation, Liturgy, Stewardship and Vocations: <https://www.dbqarch.org/priorities/>
25. In your weekly/periodic newsletter as a CSA or FFL, always present a few thoughts about a *Witness* article that can be easily read. Even share a short summary of the piece. In this way, teachers and catechists alike see news items and announcements along side *Witness* offerings. Both are very important.
26. Use issues of *The Witness* as part of an in-service meeting icebreaker or at a parent meeting or sacramental meeting. Have extra copies of *The Witness* available to send home with parents to stir interest.
27. Use issues of *The Witness* as part of a day of reflection. Use key formational articles as the content of the day. Spend time going over a good article and engage catechists in how to read an article critically and then how to live what is shared in the article. Draw relationships between what is written and what is lived, especially using the Respect Life/Social Justice themes found at <https://www.dbqarch.org/offices/respect-life/>.
28. Form a parent/guardian faith-sharing group during religious education classes. Use *The Witness* as the basis of discussion each week.
29. Use a social media site to engage staff in “online” chats and discussions on a topic or question related to a topic in *The Witness*.