

## GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START, PART I

# FERTILE SOIL

1 |

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Is your catechetical soil fertile? Or, are there rocks and clay in that soil that give no catechetical seeds a chance to grow? Think about the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8:4-15 and how its message applies to our ministry as religion teachers and catechists. Jesus teaches us that we need to prepare the soil for teaching the Gospels way before those seeds arrive in our classrooms.

When I was a child, my father would take me outside to help him plant the summer garden. The first visit to the garden had nothing to do with the actual planting. He would say, "First we build a bench, then we add compost to the soil." I was so impatient to plant! To me, it was a waste of time to build a bench and add manure to the soil. It was only months later, as Dad and I sat under the shade of the maple tree on that bench we built and enjoyed the miracle of a bountiful garden, that I understood his way of thinking.

So it is with our work as religion teachers and catechists. First, we create a wonderful environment in which to teach. It is the first work of great catechesis. Right now, weeks before we return to our classrooms, we need to prepare the soil so that we are offering a spirit-filled and graced lesson every time we gather with our students. Here are some of the best ways I know to enrich your catechetical soil!

**Replace worn resources with more engaging ones.** Old pictures, dated examples, worn out posters, and stained prayer table covers detract from classroom prayer and religion lessons. Look at the materials you've been using with a critical eye. See them as your students will see them. We want to communicate that the Gospel is as relevant now as it ever was. Take some time to freshen up or replace visuals, symbols, music, and books with more current, engaging resources. Consider purchasing *The Bible for Little Ones*, *Catholic Prayers and Practices*, *Our Family Prays*, or *Our Family Devotions* (all are published by RCL Benziger).



## AUGUST | THE NEW CATECHETICAL YEAR

2 |

**Try something new.** Research online materials, music, books, and resources that can be used as auxiliary support for your curriculum. Now is the time to start looking for a perfect Last Supper story for your second graders, good online recordings for your junior high students, or the perfect songs for your preschool prayer time. Go over the year's curriculum and find interactive activities that will make the lessons fun and engaging. I call this your "bag of tricks." I always have a few extra activities on hand for when I have extra time and nothing planned. If you have not done so, search the Catholic Resources section of [RCLBenziger.com](http://RCLBenziger.com) for seasonal activity and prayer suggestions.

**Plan good prayer and icebreakers.** It is very important to begin your lessons with prayer. As you look ahead, think about special prayers for the seasons of the Church year and weekly Scripture reflection questions that can make the lesson relevant. This is also the time to assemble the makings of your classroom prayer table. You will need a real or battery-operated candle; a Bible; a cross or crucifix; and a napkin, placemat, or cloth in the liturgical colors (white, green, purple, red, and rose or pink).

**Start praying for your students.** It is never too soon to start praying for your students. As soon as you get their names, write them a welcome note and let them know that you are thinking of and praying for them.

Fertile soil doesn't just happen. Ask any gardener and they will tell you the secret to a great harvest is taking the time to get the soil ready. So, let's get at it!

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