

Becoming a Successful Faith Sharer

1. Develop Good Habits

"Habit is the *faith sharers* best friend." Habits are acquired through concerted effort and trial and error.

The habit of sensitivity to the needs of others. Good faith sharers are sensitive people. Sensitive to their students as individuals & to their class as a whole. The kids need a good story; they like to act things out, it's time for a video.

Sensitivity is "the art of the small:' It expresses itself in a concerned look, a simple touch, a brief word.

The habit of wonder. Good faith sharers are always wondering about the fascinating world in which they live. They are sensitive to and appreciative of the wonders of creation. Because they are *interested* people, they are usually *interesting* people-and this helps them to be more effective in the classroom. They are constantly discovering materials they can use in their teaching for telling stories, raising questions, planning activities. They may read aloud a newspaper story about the daring rescue of a small child from a burning building to illustrate both selflessness and the value of human life.

The habit of cheerfulness. Good faith sharers are usually people who are basically cheerful. They tend to smile a lot. They should. They are not proclaiming the BAD news, but the GOOD news. To do so with a grumpy disposition and a sour face seems a contradiction

The habit of genuinely liking kids.

Our students are very perceptive. They know right from the start if we're "for" them or "against" them. Faith sharers who show that they really care about their students stand a better chance of being listened to and consequently of being more effective. They show they care in little ways. They listen to their students with genuine attentiveness and speak to them with sincere respect. They ask good questions of their students and praise both their work and their effort. They share with their students, tease them, trust them, and are always ready to forgive.

The habit of planning. Much of the success we have in the classroom is not due to mere chance. Rather it is the direct result of careful planning. One phase of planning is getting organized. File drawers are filled with folders carefully labeled by units or topics, people stories, "games and puzzles, inspirational stories, filled with newspaper and magazine articles that you can pull out for use on any given day. Folders for seasons of the year-Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Thanksgiving, filled with stories and games for class. Organization makes it possible for you to have more variety in your lessons. Spontaneity is important in faith sharing, but planning and organization are the soil in which spontaneity can take root.

The habit of living with delayed gratification. Means to continue to teach while seeing little if any immediate results. We feel the desire & responsibility to hand on to others what we hold as precious-our Catholic faith. Occasionally in the process we might experience immense satisfaction and we should thank and praise God when we do. But more often than not, we will not see the fruits of our labor-at least not immediately. People who can live with this fact and not become disheartened by it stand the best chance of surviving and succeeding as faith sharers.

The habit of praying. Good faith sharers usually are prayerful people. This work tends to bring us to our knees, sooner or later. When we run up against our own limitations, when we become discouraged, when we get involved in the problems of our students, we are often moved to pray to God for help and consolation. That is good. And when a student surprises us or inspires us, we are also drawn to prayer.

Effective faith sharers pray to God regularly about their ministry. They speak to God often about their students. They talk over their lessons with God, their hopes and dreams, their fears and misgivings. And in their praying, they draw more closely to God.

2. Learn

Know your message. Know the religious truths we are sharing: such as Scripture., morality, prayer, etc.. Realize that our real "product" is not knowledge alone, but the formation of individuals in the light of that knowledge. Our ultimate goal is to enable the transformation of our young people. We ourselves have been transformed by the message we teach, that we "practice what we preach ". Jesus not only taught forgiveness, he himself forgave the very people who crucified him.

Know your kids. They come to us with varying degrees of interest, willingness, intelligence, and maturity. . Jesus is our model. He knew how to relate to different people.

Relate faith to your kids needs. Once we know our faith and our kids, we must bring the two of them together. We must convince our students (often subtly) that they need what we are trying to share. We must be aware of our students need for acceptance, laughter, encouragement. exercise, quiet, forgiveness. etc. Then we plan our lessons to relate to these needs.

Be enthusiastic about our message. It is one thing to know our faith. It is quite another to feel genuine enthusiasm about it. We must not only know our faith, we must be in love with it. Effective faith sharers show a real enthusiasm for what they teach-whether it be a parable, one of the sacraments. or an incident in Jesus' life. If our Christian faith doesn't excite us, then we shouldn't be teaching it.

Listen to kids complaints and compliments. Effective faith sharers are open to both the criticism & compliments of their students, We need student input- whether that means having a suggestion box in the classroom. handing out an evaluation sheet periodically. or initiating a discussion on how things are going in the class. Inviting suggestions from our students enables them to assume more responsibility for what happens in the classroom. It also encourages us to keep modifying our methods and thus to become better at what we do.

Open kids up.

Good faith sharers invite or even lure kids into the learning process by asking provocative questions, telling intriguing stories, and making connections to the ordinary things in the students' world. Jesus was an expert questioner, story teller, and connector. He asked challenging questions: "Who do *you* say that [am'?" He directed his listeners attention to make a memorable points about God's provident love. He told unforgettable stories like "The Good'Samaritan"- to inspire his listeners to change their lives, Jesus caused quite a stir by chasing the money changers out of the Temple, but most of the time his teaching was more "soft sell" than "hard sell."

Remember that service is the key. We are in the classroom primarily to serve our students. Our teaching is truly service-oriented to the extent:

Do I like my students? Do I speak respectfully *to* them and *of* them? Is there laughter in my classroom? Am I conscientious about preparing for my classes? Am I tired after teaching? Am I proud to be a religion teacher?

We know we are playing a vital

role in the spiritual formation of the next generation We are helping to put kids in direct contact with the unfathomable ocean of God's mercy and love.