

Life After ACRE: Assessing Child/Youth Religious Education

What was . . . ACRE was designed to assist in the evaluation of catechetical/religious education programs in Catholic schools and parishes. As a multilevel, age-appropriate tool, we used ACRE in grade 5 (Level 1); grades 8 or 9 (Level 2); and grades 11 or 12 (Level 3).

The Diocese of Green Bay no longer requires the administration of ACRE in its parish faith formation programs.

What's left . . . Parishes are responsible for assessing their students and using those assessments in shaping their programming.

How do we measure effectiveness in catechesis? By Joe Paprocki



Jesus was constantly assessing the growth of his disciples. On numerous occasions, after preaching a parable, Jesus asked his followers if they understood its meaning.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29) as he attempted to assess their understanding of his identity. At the Last Supper, after he had washed the feet of the Apostles, he sat back down and asked them, "Do you realize what I have done for you?" (John 13:12).

If we are to teach as Jesus did, we must constantly be assessing, in a variety of forms, whether or not his present-day followers are grasping the knowledge and skills needed to be a disciple in today's world. We seek to assess the formation that is taking place in our learners and offer feedback leading to further growth.

Ideas:



1. Interviews:

- a. Who: Sacrament candidates? First Communion; Confirmation?
- b. When: Springtime?
- c. How: Family-style? Individual? One DRE suggests:

We interview each student after First Communion classes. This works well, because the parents are there and can see what their children know and don't know. The only "penalty" for doing poorly on an interview is a repeat interview with a list of

questions to take home and study. We usually have about 90 kids, and three of us divide up the interviews, taking siblings together, and allowing friends to come together also, which makes them more comfortable. I wish we could use this method for our regular RE students, but there are over 500 of them!

d. Sample Interview Questions for young children (suggested by Dawn Johnson, St. Anthony, Niagara):

- I. *Are you excited to make your first Communion? Why?*
- II. *Are you enjoying your classes?*
- III. *What have you learned in class so far?*
- IV. *Who loves you? Who else?*
- V. *How do you feel when you are around people who love you?*
- VI. *What is prayer? Tell me about prayer.*
- VII. *Who do you pray with? Who do you pray for?*
- VIII. *Who is Jesus? Tell me about Jesus.*
- IX. *How do we show God that we love Him?*

e. Sample Interview Questions for older students (suggested by Brittany Schoeder, St. Gabriel, Neenah)

- I. *What is something new you've learned this year? What are some highlights? Reflections from our retreat?*
- II. *Describe your relationship with God. What does it mean to be a disciple and have a personal relationship with Christ?*
- III. *What is the biggest difference you notice in your faith now vs. when you began Confirmation preparation?*
- IV. *What is your biggest challenge in your faith?*
- V. *Who is the Holy Spirit? What is the Spirit's role in the Church? In your life?*
- VI. *Has your prayer life changed at all this year? If so, how?*
- VII. *Why did you pick your Confirmation name; what does it mean to you?*
- VIII. *What was the most important thing you experienced in your relationship with your Confirmation sponsor?*
- IX. *What did you learn from your service experience?*
- X. *What are some questions you still have about the Catholic faith?*



2. **Jeopardy!** (from Joe Paprocki, *Catechists Journey*/Loyola Press):

So last evening, I conducted a Jeopardy-like review with my 6th graders and then followed it up with a final assessment. Here's a summary:

- a. *As part of our opening prayer, we included prayers for all those affected by the bombings in Boston. It is lamentable that, in the course of several*

months, we catechists have had to talk to our young people about the Newtown tragedy and now this. Let's pray for an end to such senseless violence.

- b. *The Jeopardy-like review game went very well. I projected it on the screen and my aide, Alex, kept score and was the official timer. I told the kids that all of the answers to the final assessment were in the game and provided a note-taking sheet for them, telling them that would be able to use their notes for the test! Most took copious notes. 3 young men, unfortunately, decided to use the time to catch up with each other and carried on chit chat throughout the game despite my attempts to quiet them. Take a guess as to which 3 students didn't do so well on the assessment.*
- c. *The review game lasted about 30 mins. I then had the young people write their names on their note-taking sheet and I collected them and distributed the final assessment. I spread the kids out around the room and had them get to work. 3 young men continued to be chatty, further digging a hole for themselves.*
- d. *After about 20 mins, I distributed the students' note-taking sheets and traded their pens for colored markers telling them that they would get half-credit for answers that they relied on their notes to fill in.*
- e. *When all was said and done, the results were satisfactory (for 9 out of the 13) except for...you guessed it...3 young men. Of the 13 students...*
 - *4 earned an A (90% or better), including 1 perfect score and 1 99%!*
 - *1 earned a B (80% or better)*
 - *4 earned a C (70% or better)*
 - *1 (one of the 3 young men) earned a D-/F, coming in at 49%*
 - *2 earned an F (each under 40%)*
 - *1 young lady earned an incomplete. She took copious notes during the review game, is always well behaved and was so last evening, but could only finish half of her test for some reason and did well on the first half. My guess is that she has a learning disability. She appeared to be working the whole time but she apparently has a hard time concentrating or comprehending so I want to give her a chance to complete the assessment this coming Monday.*

I'm thinking that for the coming Monday, I want the kids with the highest scores to tutor the 3 fellas who did so poorly and then give the guys another chance to show what they know because they are bright but just decided not to take things seriously and I will warn them that their parents will not appreciate them earning an unsatisfactory report from me at the end of the year.

Additional Resources:

Joe Paprocki (Catechists Journey): <https://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/?s=assessment>

Jared Dees (The Religion Teacher) <https://www.thereligionteacher.com/how-to-assess-with-no-test-formative-assessments/>