

2018 Catechist Honors Winners Spotlight

Our Top Ten Finalists



Catechist Honors celebrates the creative mission of gifted catechists, directors and coordinators of religious education (DRE/CRE), youth ministers, and religion teachers in Catholic schools. Nominations were collected from April 1 to August 1, 2017, via *Catechist.com*. These pages, and those on *Catechist.com*, contain profiles of our most inspirational finalists. Their stories illustrate our important role of passing on the faith to others. May their zeal and devotion encourage you in your catechetical mission!

CATECHISTS

Contagious Faith

DINA BEACH is a catechist for adults, serving in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. For the past two years, she has worked with 100 adults enrolled in a certification program for Latino catechists. She's been a catechist since 2001.



Dina was nominated by Mary Montour. Dina is a bilingual catechist who reaches out to the Hispanic and Latino communities. Dina has gone door-to-door to introduce herself and invite people to come to Mass and catechesis. Her efforts have paid off, as the ministry to Hispanics and Latinos in the entire archdiocese has blossomed, expanding to include a certification process that Dina organized, directed, and conducted in Spanish.

Dina surely catechizes, yet she evangelizes with a big, bold smile and a contagious spirituality. Additionally, she empowers others to also become catechists.

Dina's faith is vibrant. She prays anywhere with anyone.

Dina, what's the best advice you've received?

Develop a relationship with your students. If you know their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs, you will find the best way to bring them to the love of Jesus.

What's the most challenging topic you've taught?

Sharing Jesus' love, mercy, and compassion. Some things cannot be taught from a book. You need to be a testimony of love so others can feel it and learn from you. Many suffer with low self-esteem and don't feel they deserve God's love and attention. I draw from my own life experiences, sharing situations in which I may have felt overwhelmed, but God's love provided the remedy.

Can you share a favorite Bible verse and how it inspires you?

"For I know well the plans

I have in mind for you ... to give you a future of hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). After years of ignoring God's call, I decided to answer in a radical way ... trusting that he has good plans for me in his divine project.

Read Dina Beach's full profile at Catechist.com/HonorsProfiles.

An Inspiring Knight

BRIAN JONES is a children's catechist certified to teach the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd classes at Espiritu Santo Catholic Church in Safety Harbor, Florida. He's been a catechist for 12 years.

Brian was nominated by Ellen Jones. Brian started with students in grade 5 and continued with them through grade 8. He taught Bible studies, theology of the body, and prayer. When students in his class reached grade 9, many came back to help as religious education assistants.

Brian inspires others by making Jesus the center of his life. He encourages





men in the Knights of Columbus to teach the faith to youth. On occasion he's given his faith witness, starting with, "Being a catechist is by far the most fulfilling thing I do in the parish. If you want to learn more about your own faith, you need to teach it to others."

Brian, what's the best advice you've received?

When you teach, you are "planting seeds." Try not to get frustrated when students don't connect with the topic. Emphasize that developing a relationship with Christ is the real goal of catechesis, not only "head knowledge."

What's the most challenging topic you've taught?

Developing a prayer life and discerning vocations. I use the lives of the saints — they were people like us, yet heard God's voice speaking to their hearts. They became living examples of Christ's love. I've done guided meditative prayer, visited a local retreat center, and prayed the Stations of the Cross — activities where students encounter God's grace and love.

Can you share a favorite saint and how they inspire your mission?

Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney (1852–1890), founder of the Knights of Columbus. Father McGivney helped laymen grow in holiness while contributing to their parishes

Emphasize that developing a relationship with Christ is the real goal of catechesis, not only "head knowledge."

and communities. I have been a Knight for years.

Read Brian Jones' full profile at Catechist.com/HonorsProfiles.

Relies on the Spirit

MAIREAD MURPHY is a catechist serving grades 7 and 8 at Saint Patrick Parish in Watertown, Massachusetts. She has been a catechist for 13 years.



Mairead was nominated by Christine Breen.

For four years, Mairead has been serving with the same group consisting mostly of boys.

Mairead co-leads the youth group. Her students have joined the group, attending meetings on first Fridays. A few have become altar servers.

Mairead exemplifies the way to live out the faith. She capably connects current events and social issues to our beliefs. Her class has amazing discussions. Class attendance is excellent and these young people come to Mass.

Mairead invites students to participate in activities such as Glow-in-the-Dark Rosary Nights, writing and directing the Children's Christmas Pageant, and performing the living Stations of the Cross during Lent. Additionally, students become prayer partners with different parishioners.

Mairead, what's the best advice you've ever received?

I'm not sure who told me this, but I pray to the Holy Spirit before each class — it

Grace is the power from God to transform ourselves, but we need to be open to it.

has worked for me! I'm less stressed and more able to facilitate the discussions and use good time management.

What's the most challenging topic you've taught?

It is understanding grace and the sacraments. I explain it the way I have experienced it. Grace is the power from God to transform ourselves, but we need to be open to it. The sacraments are channels of God's grace. They rejuvenate our souls and help our hearts recognize the Lord in our lives. From there, I could see things clicking with my students. Confession, especially, was no longer intimidating to them.

What spiritual practices are helpful to you?

Eucharistic adoration and reading about different saints and other servants of God.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Catechists

Aide Sanchez Jimenez,

Holy Family Catholic Church, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

Michelle Keating, *St. Michael Church, Cranford, New Jersey*

Lisa Love, *St. Patrick Church, Hubbard, Ohio*

Rhonda Matousek, *St. John the Evangelist Catholic Parish, Loveland, Colorado*

Jennifer McCloskey, *St. Raphael Catholic Church, Rockville, Maryland*

Eileen Mcleran, *St. Canice Parish, Nevada City, California*

Exemplary Witness

STUART HENDERSON has been a middle school catechist at St. Katharine Drexel in Frederick, Maryland, for the last three years. He also assists at high school youth retreats.

Stuart was nominated by Ana Maria Alvarado.

When there was no catechist for the middle school group, Stuart not only said yes but found someone to be a co-catechist with him. Stuart brings faith alive! The following year, Stuart helped build a team for the middle school program.

This parish strives to be a welcoming community. Yet one student with special needs was having a difficult classroom experience. After consulting with the boy's family and middle school team, Stuart visited the class to see what might help. The night he visited was another difficult one for this student — who became disruptive. Stuart calmed the student down and helped him to participate. This was significant since this boy's family needed assistance with his faith formation. Thanks to Stuart, this boy was not left out, and his family discovered they had a community that was willing to support them. Additionally, this student's classmates witnessed Stuart's example — to be a true disciple of Jesus.

Stuart, what's the best advice you've received?

Always speak and treat youth with respect, and you will receive that respect back. Students often struggle with not having their voices heard. We try to provide an environment where they can speak and be heard.



What's the most challenging topic you've taught?

Reading directly from the Bible is often challenging. Sometimes youth have a hard time understanding the content as it is written, so we have fun translating the message for them in terms they can understand.

Who has been a positive influence on your faith?

There are many people — my parents, my grandmother, a few priests. My current influences are our parish community, and a new fervor for the Bible. I have never been a part of such a caring, warm, and welcoming community — like heaven on earth. I appreciate the opportunity to share the joy of our parish.

Read Stuart Henderson's full profile at Catechist.com/HonorsProfiles.

Creative and Dedicated to Preschoolers

MARTY TABOR is a diocesan-certified catechist teaching preschool at St. Alphonsus Catholic Church in Crossville, Tennessee.

Marty was nominated by Sara Carey.

Marty has been teaching preschool faith formation for more than 20 years! She is always cheerful, and so creative! Every year she comes up with interesting things for her students. She designed an iron-on transfer to create prayer pillowcases so the students can say their prayers at bedtime. She created individual alphabet



books so each student could learn the vocabulary of the Church, using photos from our own parish so they recognize what they see at Mass. Students make "faith boxes" (decorated, personalized shoe boxes) to keep all the special things they've made throughout the year.

Marty takes the students on "field trips" into the sanctuary to learn about Mass and prayer. Students sing and play games — many that she's developed. Marty's genius combines resources into cohesive lessons that meet students' needs.

Marty, what's the best advice you've received?

I am not alone. The Holy Spirit is working with me and through me. Yes! I can face the challenges ahead of me.

What's the most challenging topic you've taught?

Everything seems to be a challenge with preschoolers. I try to plant seeds of faith in everything I cover. I incorporate portions of the Mass during our Gospel story time. I try to draw them in by being creative with things they can relate to in church.

Can you share a favorite saint and how they inspire your mission?

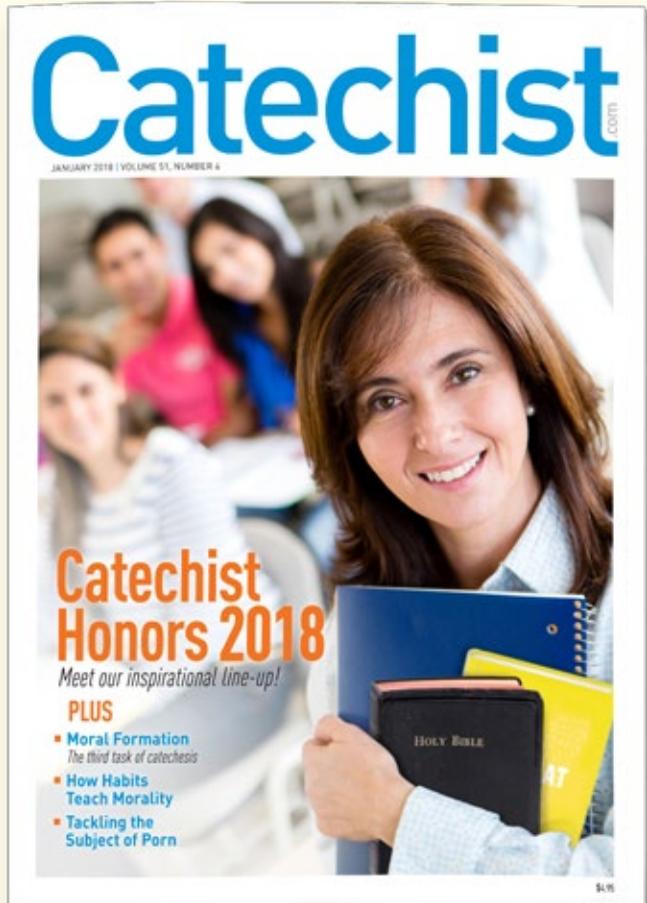
St. Anthony! Just when you think all hope is lost — like when you've lost something ... Maybe you feel like you're not getting though. "And there it is!" He helps me to continue helping others grow in their faith.

Read Marty Tabor's full profile at Catechist.com/HonorsProfiles.

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50
YEARS



Catechist magazine supports the joyful and vital mission of catechists, directors of religious education, Catholic school religion teachers and catechetical leaders at churches, schools, and in homes.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN FEBRUARY?

Catechist has expanded its offerings with Engaging Adults – shining a spotlight on adult faith formation ideas. Of course, we've always got you covered where children and youth are concerned, too.

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Servant Leader

RICARDO MCKAY is catechist at the Catholic Community of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Plano, Texas. A catechist for 15 years, he leads the RCIA program adapted for children in grades 3 through 6.

Ricardo was nominated by Denise Gilbert.

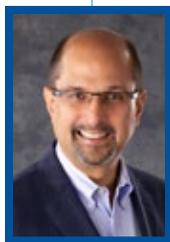
When Ricardo, a single father, decided to get back into his faith, he enrolled his fourth-grade daughter in the special class that helps children catch up on missed sacraments. A year later Ricardo volunteered to teach his daughter's fifth-grade class. For years he continued to teach fifth grade, as well as his daughter's class as she moved up. He's a popular catechist — children often request to be in his class. Ricardo also helps with First Communion Workshops and retreats with a generous and happy heart. Ricardo is an example to many families in the parish, especially to many fathers who now step up and volunteer.

When the children's special sacrament program needed new leadership — someone extraordinary to lead children and families in returning to the sacraments — Ricardo humbly accepted the task.

Ricardo, what's the best advice you've received?

You don't have to cover every single item in your lesson plan. That advice helps reduce anxiety and allows me to facilitate the session as led by the Holy Spirit.

What's the most challenging topic you've taught?



Teaching about the Trinity is always challenging. I start by “reasoning” God, the Creator (God the Father), and how we all have been created in his image and likeness because of his love for us, even before we were born. Because of that love, God sent his only Son, Jesus, to be our Savior (God the Son). There is so much love between the Father and the Son that the Holy Spirit flows among them. They share that Holy Spirit with us, to be our Advocate, to teach us, to lead us and guide us back to God the Father and God the Son.

What spiritual practices are helpful to you?

Attending daily Mass as much as possible as well as the sacrament of Reconciliation. I also read about our faith and about the saints.

Read Ricardo McKay's full profile at Catechist.com/HonorsProfiles.

DIRECTORS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Leading with Learning Options

ANNA MAE PARKHILL has been the director of religious education for preschool through eighth grade at St. Paul of the Cross in Park Ridge, Illinois, for more than 20 years. The parish program registers more than 1,250 children.

Anna Mae was nominated by Andrew Cameron.

Anna Mae has introduced training programs for catechists and developed a leadership team of



coordinators. Through regular sessions she elevates catechists to become creative leaders.

Anna Mae consistently tries new and different ways to meet needs. Sacramental preparation is a deeply religious and profound experience that affords active participation for both parents and children. The program is one of the largest in the Archdiocese of Chicago. It offers a range of learning options from traditional and Montessori-based classes to Scripture- and liturgy-based family catechesis and programs for those with special needs.

Anna Mae, what's the best advice you've received?

Faith is shared best when relevant to our lives and promoting transformation. One process that accomplishes this is theological reflection. By being present to our lives in dialogue with Scripture and Tradition, we encounter the living Christ — inviting transformation. I use theological reflection to facilitate dialogue with families on life and faith and discern their catechetical needs.

What's the most challenging topic you've taught?

The Mass. It invites us to empty ourselves in a stance of receptivity so grace can enter in and transform us through communion with God and each other. Parts of the Mass and the prayers can be easily taught, but the experience and practice of receiving grace is much more difficult to cultivate. ... The more the children are invited into story, reflection, Scripture, and prayer, the more they experience



Christ and better understand the Mass.

Can you share a Bible verse and how it inspires your mission?

Philippians 2:1-11. First, it fills me with love for God. What other response could one have toward a God who empties himself in the form of a slave? Second, it models the stance I should take in ministry. Inspired and filled with God's love, I'm able to serve. When I fail, I'm able to trust in God's forgiveness and be opened again to the source of never-ending Love.

Read Anna Mae Parkhill's full profile at Catechist.com/HonorsProfiles.

Makes Church a "Home"

MARGARET HAWKINS is coordinator of religious education for kindergarten to eighth grade at Church of St. Katharine Drexel, Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey. She's held this role for 11 years.

Margaret was nominated by Rev. John J. Vignone.

Certified in the Diocese of Camden, Margaret serves more than 500 students. The program succeeds not only as a source of religious formation, but as a "home" where youth and teens feel welcomed and respected. Margaret has great rapport with other catechists and organizes their lesson plans so each level is on the same topic. She encourages catechists to be examples of faith, and she encourages others to become catechists.

Margaret continuously updates her knowledge of current curriculums and related



programs. She introduced a program for autistic children called "Katie's Kids." She initiated a kindergarten program during the 10:30 Mass, plus organizes the "Liturgy of the Word" for children.

Margaret works with the parish youth minister encouraging involvement and service projects. She runs parent prep sessions for First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, and Confirmation.

Margaret, what's the best advice you've received?

Listening to the needs and concerns of the religious education teachers and families. This is essential, because I am there to serve and help the families.

What's the most challenging topic you've taught?

The class was discussing whether or not people in jail for murder might go to heaven. My response was, "God loves each and every one of us unconditionally. God gave us the gift of free will to be used wisely. Some people make bad judgments. Sometimes, as a result of those decisions, they end up in jail. When a person is truly sorry for their actions, they can seek forgiveness. Through the Holy Spirit a priest gives absolution and the person is forgiven. So, do you think he or she might go to heaven?"

Can you share a favorite saint and how they inspire your mission?

St. Katharine Drexel inspires me because of her dedication to children and because of my responsibilities guiding children in their lifelong faith formation. Her inspiration assisted me in

developing a religious education program called "Katie's Kids" for children with special needs.

Read Margaret Hawkins' full profile at Catechist.com/HonorsProfiles.

YOUTH MINISTER

Speaks to the Hearts of Teens

ANNA STEELE-KAMINSKI is the director of youth ministry at St. Cecilia Parish and St. Thomas Aquinas Student Center and Catholic Church, in Ames, Iowa. She's been in youth ministry for 10 years and in this role for three.

Anna was nominated by Fr. Jim Secora.

Anna has built a youth and young adult ministry program that is a model in the archdiocese. It not only involves the young adults but actively draws parents and interested adults. A respected leader, Anna's dedication inspires many, especially the teens and young adults. She's been instrumental in merging the youth and young adult ministries of St. Cecilia's with the parish at Iowa

HONORABLE MENTIONS

DREs:

Jennifer Boag,

Nativity of Our Lord Parish, Warminster, Pennsylvania

Karen Brady,

St. Mary's and Blessed Sacrament Parishes (Matthew 13 Collaborative), Walpole, Massachusetts

Dee Gembiewski,

Holy Family Parish, Middletown, Ohio

Dolly Pointner,

St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church, Lisle, Illinois

State University. Anna is pursuing a masters in theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Anna, what's the best advice you've received?

In *The God-Bearing Life*, Kenda Creasy Dean notes that when teens come to us with the hunger for answers to eternal life, we often feed them pizza instead! A lot of young people develop a mask to hide any vulnerability ... I lovingly ignore the mask. This requires hope. ... An evangelist must trust in the power of the Gospel and bravely speak directly to the inner heart longing for God.

What's the most challenging topic you've taught?

Talking to parents about the sacrament of Confirmation. Sometimes teens simply don't want to be an apostle of Christ, and neither do their parents — look what happened to the apostles! Our Confirmation prep is leadership training. Each candidate needs attention from parish staff, parents, and sponsors, silence before the Blessed Sacrament, and a support group of fellow teens to discern how God is calling them to change the world.

Can you share a favorite saint and how they inspire your mission?

St. John Paul II was the world's best youth minister because he saw us. He saw our hunger for the Lord and the world's desire to feed us something else. He called for no less than moral martyrdom, and told us to bravely be different. His words from an earlier World Youth Day are foundational for youth ministers; they haunt and inspire me: "It is



Jesus in fact that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted."

Read Anna Steele-Kaminiski's full profile at Catechist.com/HonorsProfiles.

An evangelist must trust in the power of the Gospel and bravely speak directly to the inner heart longing for God.

RELIGION TEACHER

Amazing Role Model

DAN SCHOENFELDER has been a middle school religion teacher for the last two years at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Bardstown, Kentucky. He has been a Confirmation and high school catechist at Holy Family Catholic Church in New Albany, Indiana, for the last 15 years.

Dan was nominated by Katrina Ballard and Kara Lewis.

Dan came to St. Joseph School last year as the middle school religion teacher. He worked his entire life as a maintenance engineer, and as retirement drew closer, he felt called to pass on his passion for the Faith to young people. He also spends weekends ministering in his home parish, preparing children for Confirmation.



Dan has touched the hearts of staff members and students. Kids love religion class, which is amazing for the middle school age. It is difficult to put into words the massive impact Dan has had on students. He transforms kids into kind, caring, compassionate young adults. Dan is an amazing role model for students and walks the path of faithfulness.

When Dan joined the teaching team, he flooded weekly meetings with kindness and inspiration. He recently conducted a faculty retreat. There wasn't a dry eye in the room as he presented a simple message: "Don't let anyone steal your happiness."

Dan, what's the best advice you've received?

To be real and genuine. Share who you are, warts and all!

What's the most challenging topic you've taught?

The Church's teaching regarding homosexuality. What has been most effective in my teaching is expanding upon Pope Francis' response in 2013 on this topic: "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?" I then expand upon this with Bible verses in John 8:1-11 where Jesus forgives the adulteress to show God's unlimited mercy.

What spiritual practices are helpful to you?

Praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament and serving the poor. I am involved with the St. Vincent DePaul Society and a homeless ministry.

Read Dan Schoenfelder's full profile at Catechist.com/HonorsProfiles.

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