

Job #1—Know Him

I've been a Catholic all my life, including 18 years of education at all Catholic schools, and even have B.A and M.A in Theology. How is it possible that—in all those years—there was no effort or syllabus designed to help me with the important stuff: building a faith life?

As a general unfortunate rule, the Catholic Church doesn't pass on the "faith" very well. We pass on the facts, and we pass on the teachings, traditions, rituals, and rubrics. More often than not, we're left to fend for ourselves when it comes to figuring out how to find, build, and maintain a connection to a personal God who loves us intimately.

Let's decide NOW that Job #1 one in all of our families, classrooms, youth nights and PSR or CCD classes is to guide these precious young lives towards a fruitful, vibrant, life-altering relationship with Jesus Christ. If they don't have their own experience and story of him, all our facts and history will fall on deaf, bored, and skeptical ears.



There's bad news, of course. Relationship building with our non-techy God can be a seriously uphill battle with teens. The digital culture has led to the death of downtime and silence,

replacing them with obsessive connectivity and selfie saturation. But that's the reality. As a Catholic teacher, you are contemporary apostles, evangelizing the sometimes difficult.

How? **It starts with passion.** Read the Acts of the Apostles. Peter, Paul, Stephen and the rest were emboldened, and the Church grew like a wildfire: "Three thousand were baptized" and "their number grew to 5,000" on different days. The impassioned passages of this book teach us the vital cornerstones of evangelization:

1. Make it crucial. We do our kids a lifetime disservice if we underplay the magnitude of being connected with the Big Guy. It's truly Life or Death, PATH or LOST, Heaven or Hell. We must be on fire with the mandate to bring them closer to Jesus. THIS is why they come to us. They just don't know it yet. They can learn to recite prayers and locate the facts they need with Google. Let's get to the heart of the matter when they are with us.
2. Walk the talk. They will know if you aren't rooted. Get into your own habit. Dive deeper into your faith life. You can't guide to a place you've never gone. If you are on fire, awesome! Spread the fire. If your personal faith has fallen down the rungs of the 'to do' list (work deadlines, kids soccer lessons, dinner planning...) *it's time to make time.* We can't give what we don't have and we can't receive his grace and guidance without making Knowing Him priority #1 in our own lives.
3. Give it primacy of place. As you build your lessons or start your conversations, put relationship building first. Slash anything else, but hold this sacred. Period. The apostles proclaimed the Jesus story and insisted he came to save all who lived in his love. That's what our kids need to hear and believe.

While Acts reminds us to be zealous in our message, every public speaker worth her salt know she's got to **design the presentation to increase the odds of the message being**

received.

In her book, "The Teenage Brain," Frances Jensen lays it out. Our teenagers are working with "a jacked-up, stimulus-seeking brain not yet fully capable of making mature decisions." We can't fight Mother Nature, so let's work with her. Make your lesson plan match their brains' need for variety and stimulus by sticking to two mantras:

CHANGE IT UP: Novelty is a strobe light inside a developing brain that is on hyper-drive. So use it for good. *Since our message is the same, our springboards need to change constantly in order to train the teen brain to make the mature decision to get on the PATH.*

Begin by evaluating the physical potentials of your meeting space, group work, and manipulatives:

- Change your setting—classroom, church, under a tree, prayer garden, cemetery
- Change the lighting, shading, use candles, flashlights, glow sticks (really)
- Change the desk layout [Floor plan ideas](#)
- Change their position—in a chair (change seats mid-session for a perspective shift), on the floor, standing, walking, kneeling, in a meditative yoga position
- Give input from the back of the room, while walking around, mid-aisle.
- Change up how you form groups and who is in your groups every time
- Vary your group work approach. [Group Work ideas](#)
- Everything shouldn't be white or one-dimensional. Use fabric, textiles, crafts, small bits of hardware, colored paper, markers, puff paints, recycled materials. The more unexpected your prop the more effective.

INCREASE ACCESS POINTS. Multi-sensory and multi-intelligence

lesson plans are the “It” thing. And well they should be. Not only are these brains in hyper-drive, they also have individual preferred modes of learning. A one-size-fits-most approach isn’t going to hack it.

Give yourself permission to start small if the idea of multiple access points is new to you. A couple approaches built into a prayer time or learning session is a doable and not overwhelming goal. Then take notes. What worked? What flopped? What was underwhelming? Next time you use a lesson similar to that one, add another layer. Tweak and build. Tweak and build.

Access points to have on your radar:

- Spatial
- Visual
- Smell, taste, and memory
- Intrapersonal
- Problem solving and reasoning
- Large physical movements
- Music
- Interpersonal
- Linguistics

Coming soon...More on creating multiple Access Points