

THE CALL TO TEACH

Questions for Reflection

By Denise L. Donohue, Ed.D., and Daniel P. Guernsey, Ed.D.



Facilitator's Guide

cardinalnewmansociety.org

10432 Balls Ford Road, Suite 300

Manassas, VA 20109

(703) 367-0333



Promoting and Defending Faithful Catholic Education

The Call to Teach

Facilitator's Guide
Questions for Reflection

Denise L. Donohue, Ed.D., and Daniel P. Guernsey, Ed.D.

The Cardinal Newman Society

All The Cardinal Newman Society's research and analysis, including this publication, are available at cardinalnewmansociety.org.

Cover Image: Pelenguino on Adobe Stock

Copyright © 2015, 2023 The Cardinal Newman Society.

Permission to reprint is hereby granted provided no modifications are made to the text and it is identified as a publication of The Cardinal Newman Society.

The Cardinal Newman Society
10432 Balls Ford Road, Ste 300
Manassas, Virginia 20110 (703) 367-0333
research@cardinalnewmansociety.org

The Call to Teach

Facilitator's Guide

Questions for Reflection

Directions for Use

This facilitator's guide for *The Call to Teach* assists in leading discussions about the ministry of teaching in Catholic education. It provides suggested answers to the "Questions for Reflection" located in the text, structured around five themes: The Teacher and the Mission of Catholic Education, The Teacher and Vocation, The Teacher and Faith Formation, The Teacher and Lived Witness, and The Teacher and Catholic Culture.

There are many ways to lead professional group discussions. As you reflect upon the needs and dispositions of the faculty toward these topics, you can decide whether you want them to read the texts beforehand or together as a group, how much you want them to write, whether you want them to submit what they write, and how to elicit participation from all faculty assigned to partners or targeted groups. Mixing them up from their normal social groupings is a good way to facilitate faculty bonding. Completion of the full document question sets should provide between 4-6 hours of continuing professional education.

Have participants annotate the text, then use their own annotations to facilitate discussion. If you like, you can provide them with guidelines for annotation, such as:

As you read, highlight what strikes you most (use explanation points or an underline). What is new to you? Use a money sign. For what is unclear or puzzles you, use a question mark. Star a quote or section you like the most. Put a happy face near a passage that screams, "This is us! This

is our school!” Write an “O” (for opportunity) near a passage that makes you think, “I wish I/we did even more of this at our school.”

Ask them to be prepared to discuss these annotations with a partner or small group, and then have the partners or small groups share their primary reflections or highlights with the whole faculty. Move about the room, engaging with the participants.

The “Questions for Reflection” are provided at the end of each theme in *The Call to Teach*. These consist of three types: comprehension, discussion, and teacher application.

Comprehension

Answers to these questions are found in selected quotes from Church documents or the narrative summaries. Encourage your teachers to go back into the quotes and slowly re-read them, even calling up actual source material if additional context is desired. This is an opportunity to form your teachers in the heart and mind of the Church as it views education, so take the time to slowly walk through each section to ensure clarity and understanding on the part of the faculty.

Discussion

These questions are written for open group discussion. Allow teachers to read and reflect on their written responses first and then call on volunteers to begin the discussion. Encourage participation by all teachers.

Application

These questions are designed for personal reflection and are not necessarily for public discussion. Give teachers sufficient time to reflect upon each question and write a response. Invite participants to voluntarily share their thoughts.

I. The Teacher and the Mission of Catholic Education

Comprehension

1. From where does a Catholic school derive its mission?

The mission of the Catholic Church is derived from:

- Jesus Christ, in the Great Commission given before His ascension into Heaven.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

- From the Church, whose schools are a “privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school is a center in which a specific concept of the world, of man, and of history is developed and conveyed.” (*The Catholic School*, 5-9)

2. What are the aspects of a Catholic school’s mission?

Aspects of a Catholic school’s mission include:

- “complete formation” that looks toward the student’s “final end” (*Code of Canon Law*, 795);
- “integral formation” that forms the student intellectually, morally, emotionally, physically and spiritually;
- personal sanctification;

- encounter with God in His transforming love and truth (Pope Benedict XVI, *Meeting With Catholic Educators*, 2008);
- service to the common good; and
- fostering a Catholic worldview.

See The Cardinal Newman Society's *Principles of Catholic Identity in Education* for key themes from the Church's magisterial guidance.

3. Who is involved in fulfilling the mission of Catholic education?

Those involved in the mission of Catholic education include:

- “All members of the school community” (*The Catholic School*, 34), and
- especially teachers, who must be “grounded in the principles of Catholic doctrine” and should exhibit “integrity of life” (*Code of Canon Law*, 803 §2).

Discussion

1. How is the mission of Catholic education different from that of public education?

In public education

- the mission focuses primarily on preparing students with skills and knowledge and to be sound citizens; and
- faith is removed as an interpretive framework, and *de facto* a secular, relativistic, and materialist interpretive framework is applied instead.

In Catholic education

- faith is *the* interpretive framework, especially the transcendent;
- an emphasis is placed on rising above knowledge to universal truths and virtuous living;
- teachers lead students toward wisdom and sainthood—in this life and the next; and
- the school community relies on the grace of God through prayer and the Sacraments.

2. Which aspects of the mission do we accomplish well? Which aspects can we improve upon?

Answers here will vary.

Application

1. How does the mission of Catholic education affect me, specifically as a Catholic school teacher?

Answers will vary. Help teachers see how their personal formation—both spiritual and professional—as well as their modeling of Christian witness, is vital in fulfilling the Church’s mission and helping students develop their talents and grow in holiness.

2. How can I, as a teacher, better understand, communicate, and support this mission?

Answers will vary. The point here is to guide teachers in listing specific ways they can enhance their formation and evangelize students.

II. The Teacher and Vocation

Comprehension

1. What is the difference between a vocation and a profession?

The difference between a vocation and a profession is that:

- a vocation is how God calls one to serve Him in this world;
- a vocation usually involves a strong feeling or commitment, because it is rooted deeply in one's unique personality, talents, and calling;
- a profession is a paid occupation, which may have no direct connection to a spiritual response from a higher calling; and
- professional activity is fundamentally transformed by vocation into a unique participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, carried on through one's teaching.

2. What specific commitment is asked of Catholic educators and why is this important?

The commitment is to teaching truth—including that revealed truth known to us through Christ and His Church—and to guiding students in the pursuit of truth, for in finding that truth they will find Truth Himself. Teachers are called to lead students to the truth in this most profound way (*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 1982, 16).

Discussion

1. What are the characteristics of “possessing special qualities of mind and heart?”

Answers might include:

- love and compassion;
- passion for learning and the truth;
- patience;
- a Christian vision of the human person;
- confidence in a student's ability to grow in a healthy and virtuous manner as a child of God;
- self-sacrifice, loyalty, devotion, and dedication;
- willingness to grow personally;
- willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit to work for the sanctification of this world;
- evangelization; and
- joy.

2. How is being a Catholic educator different from other teaching professions?

Being a Catholic educator includes:

- teaching to the transcendent (to see the wisdom in God's creation in all content knowledge);
- incorporating God's word, which is efficacious, into content taught;
- participating in Mass, retreats, prayer, and devotions with students and colleagues;
- building a Catholic community;
- remaining in communion with the Catholic Church through a personal life of virtuous and moral living;
- attentiveness to continued spiritual formation; and
- a commitment to the Truth—seeking it, communicating it, living it, and associating with it.

Application

1. What does it mean to me to be a Catholic school teacher?

Answers will vary.

2. How does teaching change when viewed not just as a profession, but as a vocation?

Answers will vary, but they should include answers to the discussion questions above.

III. The Teacher and Faith Formation

Comprehension

1. What is the importance of solid spiritual and professional development for teachers?

Solid spiritual and professional development help establish within teachers:

- a personal life of faith and holiness according to the moral demands of the Gospel;
- the necessity of being continuously open to learning about both subject matter and faith;
- knowledge and the understanding of the importance of witness;
- the integration of religious truths with daily life and being able to share that experience; and
- the use of pedagogical techniques that are grounded in a search for truth and the eternal, and not just the effects of the here and now.

2. How does a teacher provide integral formation for students?

Catholic schoolteachers:

- embrace the unity of knowledge across all disciplines and the foundational importance of theological truths to every study, beginning with awareness of one Creator and one fount of all knowledge;
- ensure that students are aware of the first principles of each discipline—simple truths for which there is no argument except for their certainty and their origin in God;
- teach wonder, respect, and admiration for the mind and heart of God displayed in His creation, especially in human dignity and man’s final end in full communion with God through Jesus Christ;
- understand that they are not just teaching skills and knowledge but also integrating values and religious truth into all content material;
- form the intellect together with the moral, emotional, physical, and spiritual faculties of the human person;
- understand that there is no separation between a time for learning and for formation; and
- live lives of personal witness and integrity.

Discussion

1. Why is spiritual formation important for teachers?

Spiritual formation is important because:

- teachers are charged with attending to the spiritual lives of the students in their care;

- personal witness and example are important methods of passing on the faith;
- a deeply lived and experienced spiritual life will be evident not just to the students in a teacher's care but also to their colleagues, who are on a similar quest to a life of holiness; and
- a rich prayer life—including meditative silence, a frequent reception of the sacraments, and growth in spiritual knowledge—are hallmarks of a vibrant Catholic spiritual life.

2. Are all professional development programs applicable for Catholic education? Are some programs better than others? How so?

This is a great opportunity to read The Cardinal Newman Society's *Policy Standards on Secular Academic Materials and Programs in Catholic Education* and the *Procedure and Checklist for the Evaluation and Use of Secular Materials and Programs in Catholic Education*.

Teachers should:

- beware of programs that promote atheism, agnosticism, scientific materialism, or a false ideology about the human person;
- look for programs that unite faith and reason, in fidelity to Catholic teaching; and
- understand that most programs do not attend to the broader mission and needs of Catholic schools and educators and that teachers must seek to address those needs, not just accept a program as is.

Application

1. How do I attend to my own personal spiritual formation so that I can then help form my students?

Answers will vary. Ideas might include:

- commitment to daily Mass and Confession;
- daily scripture reading and reflection;
- additional catechetical training and certifications; and
- retreats, spiritual devotions, and opportunities for meditative silence.

2. In what ways do I work at improving my professional instruction? Am I intimidated or insulted by being required to attend professional development? Why?

Answers will vary. Administrators might ask here about opportunities for personalized professional development for teachers.

3. In what ways do I engage parents in the educational process? Can I do more? Do I have any fears about parents that might keep them at a distance?

Answers will vary. Some ideas for more parent engagement are:

- notes or emails to parents on a more frequent basis, especially for those students who need additional attention; and
- formation programs for parents on a host of subjects.

IV. The Teacher and Lived Witness

Comprehension

1. What does the Church say about the witness of the teacher in Catholic education?

The Church says:

- By their life as much as by their instruction, they should bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher. (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 8)
- It is through this witness and their personal relationship with students that the teacher helps the Church fulfill her mission of evangelization and salvation.
- The integration of culture and faith is mediated by the integration of faith and life in the person of the teacher.

2. Is this witness only expected during school hours? Only from Catholics?

All those working in Catholic education are called to Christian witness:

- “Teachers reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behavior.” (*The Catholic School*, 43)
- “Students should see in their teachers the Christian attitude and behavior that is often so conspicuously absent from the secular atmosphere in which they live. Without this witness, living in such an atmosphere, they may begin to regard Christian behavior as an impossible ideal.” (*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 96)

- Those who are not Catholic and who are working in Catholic education are called to “recognize and respect the Catholic character of the school from the moment of their employment.” (*The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, 47)

3. What does “the service of the teacher as an ecclesiastical *munus* and office” mean?

The definition of *munus* in Latin means “duty, office, or function.” Teachers are called by God to “fulfill a special responsibility of education. Through their teaching-pedagogical skills, as well as by bearing witness through their lives, they allow the Catholic school to realize its formative project” (*The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, 45).

Discussion

1. What conduct of the teacher is considered “moral behavior”?

Refer or remind your teachers of language from their employment agreements.

2. How does the importance of sound moral witness extend to all Catholic school employees, including coaches, counselors, librarians, and support staff?

The most recent document from the Vatican, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (20, 38, 39), states:

“Therefore, for all the members of the school community, the ‘principles of the Gospel in this manner become the educational norms since the school then has them as its internal motivation and final goal’...

The whole school community is responsible for implementing the school's Catholic educational project as an expression of its ecclesiality and its being a part of the community of the Church... Everyone has the obligation to recognize, respect and bear witness to the Catholic identity of the school, officially set out in the educational project. This applies to the teaching staff, the non-teaching personnel, and the pupils and their families.”

Sound moral witness extends to everyone within the Catholic school.

Application

1. Recall a time when what you did was inconsistent with what students are taught in Catholic education. How did this affect you as a teacher? How did this affect your students? Is there anything you would do differently, if the situation presented itself again?

Answers will vary.

V. The Teacher and Catholic Culture

Comprehension

1. How should we understand the task of “critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith”?

The transmission of culture is passed along to the student through the choice of curated curricular materials and instructional approaches that present Church history, tradition, and scripture as well as human language, history,

politics, literature, arts, leisure, customs, and accumulated wisdom. Teachers form students to think with a philosophical and Christian mindset that looks to the integration of knowledge and the higher causes of things that find their source and fulfillment in God.

2. What pedagogy is appropriate to teaching culture in Catholic education?

The pedagogy advocated in the readings directs the teacher, as witness, to:

- communicate truth and a value-oriented culture, not missing the opportunity of integrating culture and faith;
- integrate “all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian;” and
- have personal, direct relationships and openness to dialogue with students that “will facilitate an understanding of the witness to faith that is revealed through [their] behavior.”

(Lay Catholic in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, 1982, #21).

3. What is the intended effect of using this type of pedagogy?

The intended effect of the dialogue and the building of a relationship between the student and teacher is to give the student a deeper understanding of what it means to live a life of faith through the witness of the teacher.

Discussion

1. What is culture? What is a Catholic culture?

Culture:

- includes the values and meanings used to interpret and make sense of the world around us;
- is the lived experience we receive and develop from interaction with others that forms the way we integrate, make sense of, and place value upon our experiences and the world around us;
- provides a framework/worldview we naturally use as children and then adopt as our own through adolescence and adulthood as we learn, make choices, and make our way through the world; and
- is the “common culture” that surrounds us in the life of the world: movies, arts, politics, social media, advertising, sports, etc. It is currently in many ways antithetical and hostile to Catholic culture, which is imbued with faith and differs in the values and meanings ascribed to life’s purpose and events.

Catholic culture involves all that composes the Catholic religion: dogmas, doctrines, teaching, sacraments, etc.

2. How is culture transmitted in Catholic education?

Culture is transmitted by:

- the choices, actions, and example of the teacher who lives out faith as a witness and model of truth and goodness for students;
- students’ encounters with literature and the arts, including the best works that have stood the test of

time and allow for a rich and complete discussion of humanity, human nature, human destiny, and our relationships with God and each other, all as designed by God and redeemed by Christ;

- a curriculum that includes opportunities to integrate faith and grow in virtue, with rich and beautiful selections from history and literature that pass along the Catholic cultural heritage through a variety of pedagogies that reach all children;
- the use of academic standards such as The Cardinal Newman Society's *Catholic Curriculum Standards*, which focus on the transmission of values and beliefs of the community; and
- the practices of families who pointedly and purposefully live the Catholic heritage, traditions, and symbols fully aside from a world that constantly fights against them.

3. What are critical elements of a Catholic worldview?

Critical elements of a Catholic worldview are elements that define the beliefs and values of the Catholic faith. Examples include:

- God created the world good and with a plan.
- He loves us, redeems us, and guides us as Father, Son, and Spirit.
- He has revealed a plan for us through scripture and tradition that involves us loving Him and each other in this life and being with Him for eternity.
- We are created as body/soul unities, with innate dignity and freedom, and with the responsibility to seek the Truth and act upon it.
- Essential truths are knowable by faith and reason.

Application

1. How can I better transmit culture in light of the Catholic faith to my students?

Answers will vary but should include some of the guidance above.

2. What is the predominate worldview of my students, and how can I successfully help them adopt a richer Catholic worldview?

Answers will vary. See various resources from The Cardinal Newman Society that might address some of the responses you receive: *Why Critical Race Theory is Contrary to Catholic Education*; *Protecting the Human Person: Gender Issues in Catholic School and College Sports*; *Policy Standards on Human Sexuality in Catholic Education*; *Getting it Right: Witness and Teaching on Sexuality in Catholic Education*.

Notes

cardinalnewmansociety.org

10432 Balls Ford Road, Suite 300

Manassas, VA 20109

(703) 367-0333

