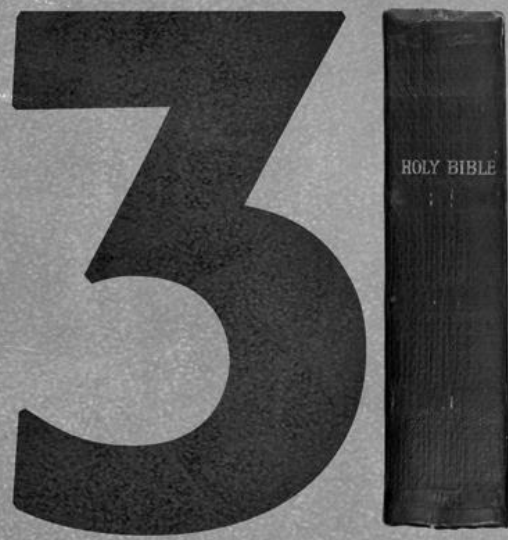


“An exciting and superbly practical field guide
for those who love the Catholic faith.”

Lisa Mladinich

Author of *Be an Amazing Catechist*



31 DAYS to
Becoming a
BETTER
RELIGIOUS
EDUCATOR

Jared Dees

Creator of TheReligionTeacher.com

Foreword by Joe Paprocki

Author of *The Catechist's Toolbox*

LEADER'S GUIDE

When I wrote *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator*, my goal was to create the most practical resources possible to help religious educators become better at their vocation to share the faith with young people. There are so many things we, as catechists and religion teachers, know we should do but just need a little reminder to carry out. There are also many strategies and approaches to catechesis and evangelization contained in *31 Days* that might be new to your group.

My hope with the *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator Leader's Guide* is to provide you, as the catechetical leader or department chair, with a practical resource to guide your volunteers or staff through each of the 31 days of exercises. This leader's guide includes daily worksheets, reflection questions, and graphic organizers that can be used as individual or group activities.

Retreats, In-Services, and Meetings

One way to use this leader's guide is to print out select activities to go along with certain days of the *31 Days* book. You may decide to do some or all activities in this leader's guide together as a group or to pick and choose some activities for group work and encourage your religious educators to do the rest of the exercises at home.

Guidance by Email

As the leader, you may also decide to send reminders to your volunteers or staff to complete each exercise in the *31 Days* book and provide links to relevant resources at *The Religion Teacher* during a specified period of time. You can email them each of the printouts in this *31 Days Leader's Guide* to help them complete the exercise for the day. To download individual copies of each day's worksheet, visit www.thereligionteacher.com/31days/leader.

If you ever have any questions about the book, the exercises, or other needs related to religious education, don't hesitate to contact me at *The Religion Teacher*.

God Bless,

Jared Dees

The Religion Teacher

Author of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator*

Exercise 1: The Big Why List

“Your vocation in life is where your greatest joy meets the world’s greatest need.”

— Frederick Buechner

1. List all of the needs of the Church or of the students you teach below.
2. If I had to choose just one lesson about God that my students needed to hear the most, what would it be?
3. What is one belief my students struggle with the most?
4. What is one spiritual practice my students could benefit from the most?
5. If I could help my students make one change in their life, what would it be?
6. What aspect of the faith are kids missing the most in their lives?
7. What are the biggest problems adult Catholics experience in the Church?

Star or circle the answers that either get you excited or make you angry. If there is only one answer that gets you really excited, then consider this the focal point of your call to teach.

Exercise 2: Recognize Your Relationship with Christ

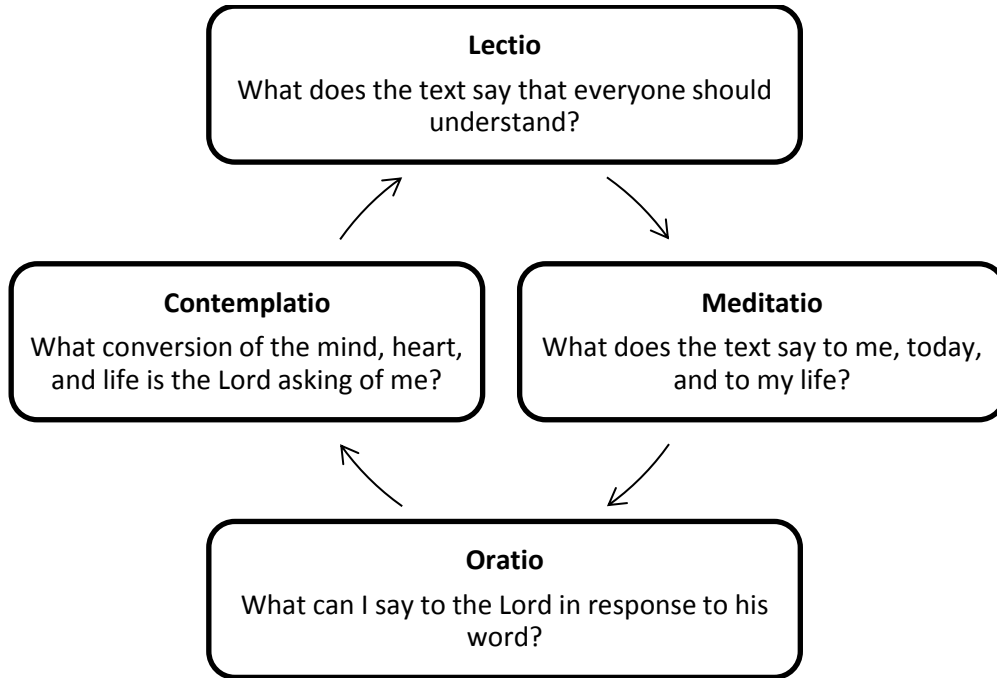
1. How did you meet Jesus Christ? (Who introduced you to him? What are your earliest memories of him?)
2. How has your relationship grown over the years? (How did you come to know him more deeply?)
3. What is your relationship with Christ like today? (How often do you spend time with him in prayer? When and how do you pray? When do you think about Christ the most?)

A Timeline of Your Relationship with Christ (Turn the paper sideways)



Exercise 4: Lectio Divina

Directions: Select a passage from the Bible and read it a few times. Answer the questions in each box below. Write the responses on this handout or in a journal.



Lectio: _____

Meditatio: _____

Oratio: _____

Contemplatio: _____

Exercise 5: Read the Writings of a Saint

Saint: _____

Title of the Work: _____

Passages I Liked:

Top Takeaways:

Exercise 7: Make Prayer a Habit

The prayer experience I want to add:

My current routine:

My new routine with the prayer habit:

The obstacles I will face in making this prayer a habit:

I will remind myself to pray by:

Exercise 8: Differentiated Instruction

Think of an activity you have done in class in each of the following categories and list them in the boxes below. Star the activities that worked well and consider how you can incorporate more activities that appeal to that same style of learning.

When Students . . .	Class Activities
Listen	
Read	
Write	
Speak	
Solve a Problem	
View a Picture	
Draw a Picture	
View a Video	
Make a Video	
Move	
Listen to Music	
Create Music	
Work Together	
Reflect Internally	

Exercise 9: Identify Student Strengths

<i>Student</i>	<i>Free Time</i>	<i>Observable Strengths</i>	<i>Self-Identified Strengths</i>	<i>Category</i>

Suggested Categories: interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, logical, mathematical, analytical, visual, verbal, spatial, naturalistic, spiritual

Exercise 10: Get to Know a Student before or after Class

Assuming you won't see your class today, select one of your students. Write him or her a letter to spark a conversation in class. Ask questions. Tell stories, but only if you think it will help the student open up. Use this sheet of paper for brainstorming or pre-writing.

Exercise 11: Write a Note of Praise to a Student Who Struggles

Great Job Today!

Great Job Today!

Great Job Today!

Great Job Today!

Exercise 12: Compliment a Parent about a Child

Use the following template to write a note or make a phone call to a student's parents.

Hi [parent's name], this is [student's name]'s [religion teacher/catechist].

I'm calling with some good news about your [son/daughter]. I want to share with you how impressed I have been with [his/her] actions. [He/she]. . . [explain the positive actions or efforts you would like to share with the parent]. These kinds of actions have made [him/her] an important asset to our classroom and [school/parish] community. Thanks for everything you do for [him/her].

I am always available if you have any questions about your child's progress or if you want to hear more about what we are doing in class. Just reach out to me via [state how you would like parents to contact you: e-mail, phone, written note, etc.].

Thanks for your time! Have a wonderful night.

Exercise 13: Pray for Your Students

Write the name of a student and a short prayer tailored specifically to their needs. Do this for as many students as possible.

_____ — _____

_____ — _____

_____ — _____

_____ — _____

_____ — _____

Exercise 14: Eliminate the Time-Wasters

Make a list of the parts of your lesson during which the most time is wasted (see page 72 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator* for examples).

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Which of the suggested teaching strategies on pages 73–75 can you do to eliminate some of these wasteful moments? Write down the strategy below and how you will use it in your class.

Exercise 15: Update Your Classroom Procedures

List the most common questions you get in class, as well as the instructions you find yourself repeating over and over again.

Design New Procedures

What procedures can you create, introduce, and practice with your students so that you don't have to answer those common questions or repeat instructions? Describe the step-by-step procedures in detail below.

Reference pages 77–79 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator* for advice on implementing new procedures.

Exercise 16: Update Your Classroom Rules

In the space below, write or rewrite some rules for your classroom. Use the tips about creating classroom rules on pages 83–84 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator* for guidance.

Set standard consequences for breaking one of the rules above. What consequence will students experience if they break a rule?

Exercise 17: Articulate Your Classroom Vision

What is the name of the school or parish where you teach? _____

Is there a vision or mission statement already associated with this institution or the person or persons from which its name is taken? If so, describe it in the space below:

What virtues or goals are you most passionate about for your students? (Refer to your notes from Day 1 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator* to refresh your memory)

Finally, state a simple summary of the vision you would like to present to your class. It can be a short phrase or a longer mission statement, but be sure it is something you and your students will be passionate about pursuing!

Exercise 18: Practice Giving Positive, Constructive Feedback

Using the tips on pages 93–94 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator*, fill in the spaces below to practice giving constructive criticism using the “sandwich approach.”

Positive Comment

(Focus on specific actions connected to student effort.)

Constructive Criticism

(Explain the mistake and how they can act differently.)

Positive Comment

(Point to a specific action related to effort that the student is capable of doing.)

Exercise 19: Give Students Ownership over Certain Tasks

List all of the daily tasks you do as a religious educator during a given day or class meeting. Which of these tasks could you assign to a student to do instead? Write a list of the tasks below and a student's name next to each task. Be ready to rotate other students into these jobs as the year goes on.

Task/Job	Student

Exercise 20: Write Out Why a Lesson is Important

Examine your next lesson plan or recall your most recent class lesson and answer the questions below.

Why do *I* have to know this information? How has knowing this information benefited *me* as an adult?

Regardless of who is learning this lesson, what are all of the possible benefits to learning about this?

From the list above, which benefits would appeal to my students the most and why?

If I had to share just one reason with my students for learning this lesson, what would it be? (This is your hook, the connection you will make between your students' lives and the lesson you teach.)

Exercise 21: Draft or Edit Student Learning Objectives

Use the steps below to draft or edit your next lesson's learning objective. Reference pages 111–13 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator* to understand the format of a learning objective.

1. Choose the topic of the lesson.

2. Brainstorm all the possible objectives (goals) that your students could have in learning about this topic. Don't filter them out yet. Write everything that comes to mind, even if it may be too difficult or too easy for your students.

3. From the list of objectives in #2, select one or two that are most important and most appropriate for your students.

Exercise 22: Assess Without a Test

Using the list of formative assessment suggested on pages 117–18 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator*, choose one to incorporate into your next lesson. In the space below describe the materials you will need, when you will have students do the assessment, and what you will have them do.

Exercise 23: Simplify Your Lesson

Examine your next lesson plan or use this exercise to evaluate your most recent lesson plan. Complete the following statements.

If my students learn nothing else during this lesson, they must learn . . .

Or, the single most important thing for students to learn in the lesson is . . .

I will teach about this core concept in the following ways . . .

Exercise 24: Tell a Story in Class

Read through the possible types of stories you could tell in class on pages 126–27 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator*. Select a story that relates to your lesson, and describe it in three parts below.

Exercise 25: Change the Way Your Students Read Their Textbook

On pages 131–33 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator* there are a number of reading strategies that you can use with your students. Select one of these strategies and use it yourself with a later chapter of the book or a selection from the Bible.

Use the space below to practice with this strategy.

Exercise 26: Plan and Assign a Project

Step 1: Write out a unit goal.

At the end of these weeks, students will be able to . . .

Step 2: Design a project.

Students will . . .

To complete this project, they must:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Step 3: Design a rubric.

I will objectively evaluate each project using the following guidelines:

(4/A) An excellent project will . . .

(3/B) A good project will . . .

(2/C) A satisfactory project will . . .

(1/D) An unsatisfactory project will . . .

(1/F) An incomplete project will . . .

Exercise 27: Incorporate Music into Your Lesson

Read about the four ways to use music in your classroom described on pages 142–44 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator*, and select one to incorporate into your next lesson. Describe how you will use this method in the space below.

Exercise 28: Liberate Students from their Chairs

Survey the activity suggestions on pages 147–48 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator* and add one to your next lesson plan. Write the name of the activity below and explain why you think your students will benefit from this activity.

Bodily/Kinesthetic Activity: _____

My students will benefit from this activity because . . .

Exercise 29: Lesson Review Template

Using the graphic organizer below, evaluate a recent lesson.

The Bright Spots (What went well?)	The Room for Improvement (What didn't go well?)
Changes (What would I change if I had to do it again?)	

Exercise 30: Visualize a Lesson in Action

Use the steps on pages 155–57 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator* to help visualize your next lesson.

Lesson Plan	Challenges I Might Encounter	Actions I Will Take

I will make the following changes to my lesson plan . . .

Exercise 31: Become a Witness

Think of a religious experience in your life that changed you in some way. Read and answer the questions on pages 162–63 of *31 Days to Becoming a Better Religious Educator* below.

Conversion Experience: _____

P: Prior Experience

R: Receive Grace

O: Openness to Grace

C: Conversion

ESS: Witness