

## ***Profile of a Sixth Grade Child***

### **Characteristics**

Sixth-graders feel they do not belong for they are too old for elementary school and too young for junior high. Along with increased physical growth, eleven-year-olds are developing new emotional patterns and are subject to variable moods from one extreme to another. They may be fidgety, disagreeable, resentful, argumentative, insolent, and sulky at one time and at others exuberant, out-going, candid, communicative, sincere, and friendly.

Pre-adolescents are interested in bodily development. Sexual curiosity intensifies, and they begin to take care of their personal appearance. Most eleven-year-olds exhibit a growing interest in clothes, although this does not mean they know how to choose or how to care for their clothing.

By now they are comfortable with abstract ideas and reasoning, though they still need concrete objects and examples in order to grasp general principles. They become curious about details of the past, about “what really happened.” They are aware of evil in the world, of social problems, and of the need for group action to meet human needs.

### **Faith Development Needs**

Sixth-graders question almost everything and they want detailed explanations instead of yes-or-no answers to basic questions about the meaning of life. They need to learn to make sound moral judgments based on Christian principles, realizing that each choice or decision they make either strengthens or weakens their relationship with God and others.

Eleven-year-olds are beginning to recognize connections between the past and the present. This is the appropriate time to teach, in a detailed manner, The Story of the Bible, also called God’s Plan of Salvation History. (See Overview / Scope section pages 19-20). The catechist will guide the students to understand that salvation history is still unfolding and that God continues to communicate Himself to us in everyday life. This is an opportunity to teach about actual grace.

Pre-adolescents, due to their growing awareness of their impulses and their feelings, develop definite ideas about their future. The catechist is to encourage them to learn about vocations of Christian service in religious life and/or the ordained ministry.

It is necessary to foster the virtue of hope. Christian hope is based upon knowledge of the love God has for us, and on a love that knows that with God all things are possible. Scripture is to be studied on a daily basis in order to deepen hope. The pages of the Bible reveal to us that God has kept all of His promises. He sent His Son as our Savior and to begin the Church through which we can receive the Sacraments, Special emphasis needs to be placed on receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and receiving His forgiveness and healing in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Eleven-year-olds are self-conscious about their bodies. Therefore, they need to be led to understand and accept themselves as persons who possess the dignity (worth) of being children of God.

The pre-adolescent is beginning to experience the inner “world” of emotions, confusion, and indolence. Consequently, the catechist can help to develop a deeper realization that original sin has an effect on human passions, intellect, and will; e.g., the attraction to false happiness like riches or physical pleasure.

Learning to live as Jesus wants us to will require training. The way that we make good and holy choices is through the exercise of virtue. A virtue is a good moral habit. We develop the Cardinal

Virtues (moral virtues) of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance through education, deliberate acts and perseverance in struggle. These efforts are purified and elevated by God's grace (CCC 1810).

<u>Prudence:</u>	Discovering our true good and choosing the right means of achieving it (Simplified definition) making a right judgment
<u>Justice:</u>	Giving the proper due to God and neighbor Being fair
<u>Fortitude/Courage:</u>	Firmness in the pursuit of good The courage to do what is right
<u>Temperance:</u>	Moderating the attraction of the pleasures of the senses that provide balance in the use of created goods Acting with self discipline or self control (CCC 1803-1809)

Example: The virtue of justice is exercised when children are fair in sharing their possessions. The virtue of temperance is exercised when young people use the Internet for twenty minutes rather than two hours.

The catechist can help the children to choose to be good out of love for God by loving and respecting others. This will require that children be helped to develop the virtues so as to become habits in order to guide their conduct (CCC 1805-1809). According to *the Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, Guidelines for Education within the Family by the Pontifical Council for the Family – Rome (hereafter TM), from the age of innocence until the time of puberty, children are to be trained in friendship skills and virtuous living. Developing the virtue of temperance involves formation in self-discipline and self-control. The virtue of temperance is the foundation of the virtue of chastity, which allows us to overcome the temptation to look upon or use another person as an object for pleasure and sexual satisfaction rather than a person to be loved. This temptation is a result of the effects of original sin. Therefore, the virtue of chastity needs to be developed. The document notes that for children in the years of innocence, “this period of tranquility and serenity must never be disturbed by unnecessary information about sex” (TM #78). Chastity is training in the “gift of the person” (CCC 2346). “Chastity is not to be understood as a repressive attitude. On the contrary, chastity should be understood rather as the purity and temporary stewardship of a precious and rich gift of love, in view of the self-giving realized in each person’s specific vocation...Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being”(TM #4). The integration of sexuality means self-mastery, in controlling desires and submitting them to love and respect as ordered to the gift of self. “The virtue of chastity blossoms in friendship” (CCC 2347).

“As in the first years of life also during childhood, parents [and teachers] should encourage a spirit of collaboration, obedience, generosity and self-denial in their children, as well as a capacity for self-reflection and sublimation. In fact, a characteristic of this period of development is an attraction toward intellectual activities. Using the intellect makes it possible to acquire the strength and ability to control the surrounding situation and, before long, to control bodily instincts, so as to transform them into intellectual and rational activities” (TM #86).

“An undisciplined or spoiled child is inclined toward certain immaturity and moral weakness in future years because chastity is difficult to maintain if a person develops selfish or disordered habits and cannot behave with proper concern and respect for others. Parents [and teachers] should present objective standards of what is right and wrong, thereby creating a sure moral framework for life” (TM #86).

It is the understanding of the Catholic Church that parents are the primary educators of their children. In the Catholic Schools and Religious Education Programs, formation in chastity will be taught in the context of the moral life with a focus on the dignity of the human person. Human sexuality, which is to include formation in chastity, is the responsibility of the parents.

Educating children for chastity strives to achieve three objectives:

1. To maintain in the family *a positive atmosphere of love, virtue and respect for the gifts of God*, in particular the gift of life
2. To help children to understand the value of sexuality and chastity in stages, sustaining their growth through enlightening words, example and prayer
3. To help them understand and discover *their own vocation to marriage or to consecrated virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven* in harmony with and respecting their attitudes and inclinations and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (TM #22)

At the heart of this task of educating their children in chastity, parents are enlightened by “two fundamental truths:

- that man is called to live in truth and love
- that everyone finds fulfillment through the sincere gift of self (TM #37)

It is the duty of the parish to help and support parents “in fulfilling their fundamental right and duty to educate their children for love.” (TM #41-47) The Diocese of La Crosse, through the Office of Natural Family Planning, offers training and support for parents and parents/young people in matters of human sexuality and formation for chastity. For information call (608) 791-2658. The Diocese also offers resources such as *Taking A Stand, Helping our Kids Win the Battle for Sexual Purity* for both parents, Catholic school teachers and catechists in the religious education programs. Please call the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization for recommendations on resources or training for religious educators (608) 791-2658.

### **Implications**

The fact that sixth-graders are more aware of social problems, indeed have a strong sense of social justice, results in their willingness to help others, even at some risk or actual cost to themselves. The catechist can lead them in their studies to the Scriptural history of God’s identity with the oppressed and His action to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Students at this age need a safe and secure setting for exploring questions and doubts. As they try to integrate the reality of their life experience with their religious beliefs, they need a forum in which to explore their feelings. It is crucial that the catechist provide such a forum. It would be helpful to have the students write down their questions so that answers can be carefully prepared in a concise manner for the following session.

Peer pressure is becoming stronger. However, youth are willing to work hard and have a zest for community projects. This is a good age for planning activities that are of service to those in need.

In teaching young people to pray, the catechist should keep in mind that learning to pray is different from learning prayers. Prayer is to be taught so that the boys and girls unite themselves to God with spontaneity and joy. Silent prayer is to be encouraged, for example, after the narration of a Gospel passage, especially using “Praying with Scripture” (*Lectio Divina*). The prayer worksheet can be downloaded from the Diocesan website, on the Catechesis page. The prayer dimension of good decision-making can be introduced at this time.

Catechists need to nourish their own personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Through continued growth in prayer they are enabled to make an essential contribution to the lives of the children by sharing faith experiences with them. The best textbook is the spiritual life of the catechist.

The Profile of a Sixth Grade Child, including Characteristics, Faith Development Needs and Implications was adapted from the Diocesan Curriculum, Office for Catechesis, Diocese of Sioux Falls.