

Catapulting into a new faith opportunity

After Mass on Sunday, our faith formation program offered a festival of activities. There were a couple of moonbounces, a football toss, a make-your-own-book station, and a variety of crafts.

When I saw the sign-up, I knew right away where I wanted to volunteer: the catapult-building table.

Many years ago, I had to build a catapult for my high school physics class, and I followed that up with two catapults I made for my Latin teacher. If my memory is correct, my physicist father had much more to do with the success of those projects than I did. But I figured I had enough knowledge to be a catapult volunteer.

I arrived to a table full of popsicle sticks, plastic spoons, rubber bands, and a sheet of instructions.

Perfect.

As the children and their parents visited my table, I greeted them and then explained the instructions. And I quickly noticed that their catapults' success had nothing to do with my teaching or with the age or experience of the builders.

Some people—even children—just seemed to have an intuitive sense of how to work with the rubber bands. A few even showed me a better place to put the spoon or how they could connect the pieces so the cotton balls would go farther.

It really made me appreciate once again that God gives us each different talents. Some of us are better with cats or catechesis than catapults, but there's a role for each of us. I love telling our children that there is a job God has in mind just for each of them—something no one else can do exactly the way they will. We often wonder what that will be.

My new role this fall—one I didn't expect God to ask me to take on—is to teach a

group of kindergarteners every Sunday through the faith formation program. I'm nervous, but also so, so excited for this new opportunity. Is there anything more wonderful than having the chance to talk with children about Jesus—and to listen to them talking about their faith?



Part of my assignment at my catapult station was not just to help people build catapults, but to speak with the children about God. I didn't do as much with that as I would have liked. We were so busy stretching rubber bands and counting popsicle sticks and repairing broken spoons.

But God was there. He was present in every child's face, in every conversation we had about their first weeks of school, in their proud parents' eyes as they worked, in the little fingers that pulled and pushed the sticks into place, and, of course, in the shouts and laughter as they launched the cotton balls.

About halfway through my shift a fifth grade boy stopped by. He didn't have the easiest time building his catapult, and I had to give him some extra attention, but he was really excited to test it when he was finished.

"A little while ago someone else tried to get a cotton ball through that hoop," I told him, pointing at a basketball net hanging above our table. "He didn't have any luck, but maybe you will."

Then I turned back to my table to help the next child. A few minutes later, though, my fifth-grade friend was back.

"I can do it!" he said. "Watch!"

And he used his little popsicle-stick catapult to send a cotton ball through the net high over our heads. I was impressed.

I have to admit I hadn't considered teaching children about our faith on Sundays, mostly because I thought our children would still be in Catholic school this year and

the year after that and the year after that. When God made clear to us that we had to choose a different path for our family this academic year, I sat at the last school Mass of the year and cried. I know it was the right decision, but I'm still a little sad about it.

But as I was trying to help children build their catapults, I thought about how I arrived at this place, and how grateful I am to my friend who invited me to teach. Change can be both difficult and good.

I'll never send a cotton ball through a basketball hoop. But maybe, just maybe, I have something to bring to those Sunday school classes that only I can bring. I don't know what that is, but God does. And that's all that matters.

"I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength." - Phillipians 4:13