

NCEA 2014 in Pittsburgh, PA  
**10 Ways to Make it Stick:**  
**The Importance of Connection to Preaching and Teaching**  
*Summary of Main Points*

This workshop is an offshoot of last year's NCEA workshop on how to make human connections with today's Catholic youth, coming from the words of 561 high school students in *Are You Talking to Me? A Study of Young Listeners' Connection with Catholic Sunday Preaching*, doctoral thesis for Aquinas Institute, in St. Louis, MO. The focus of this particular workshop is on memory – how can you be a memorable person; how can you pass on a memorable message in preaching and teaching, not to glorify yourself, but to bring God glory?

We live in a noisy and over-communicated world. How can our voice be heard? Does it help to yell, “Pay attention!” This is important!” “You need to remember this!” Listen to me!” Those we work with tune it out.

On the light side of memory, “salience” describes how easily something comes to mind – how readily do we remember it? Ten of the best-known advertising slogans come to mind readily: the energizer bunny, Lay's potato chips, Nike, etc.

Moving more richly, memory is also one of the deepest places in our lives. Like a baby deer hiding in a thicket while the rest of the world moves past, the world of our own personal memory is unique, deeply within, and a place known only to us. What are your earliest memories? Who is in the thicket with you? What does that feel like? Early memories can be joyful. Early memories may need healing.

“Memory” and “remembrance” are woven all through Scripture, Church tradition, and liturgy. In the Old Testament: do not forget the Lord your God; remember when you were slaves in Egypt; remember your kindness, O Lord; remember your mercy and forget our sins; (Isaiah) Even if a mother forget her child, I will never forget you;; In the New Testament: “Jesus, remember me” on the cross; at the consecration, “Do this in memory of me.”

Remember a time when you were close to God; Jesus remember me – pray for this workshop, for our experience at NCEA, for our openness to the memories that God wants to create in us; to be forgotten is to be hollowed out; to be not remembered is one of the most painful experiences of human life; Jesus remember us, be with us, keep us close to you.

Name a person who has made an impact on your life: who is it? What did they do that was memorable? How can we be that? How can we do that? From research in memory, as well as my own research into connection, there are basic principles of memory that can help us to be that person and create those memories

In simplified form, Memory → Belief → Attitude → Behavior; the story that we tell inside of our heads comes from the experience that underlies that memory, that is what helps to form our beliefs. Our attitude comes from what we believe; our behavior arises from that attitude.

## Ten Ways to Make it Stick:

- 1) Recast the story to change the belief, the attitude, the behavior. Pope Francis is busy recasting the story of the Catholic Church; not changing the story, but changing how the story is heard. For those who are young, work not on recasting, but in forming and creating experiences that will create good memories.
- 2) Negative memory is weighty. We remember the bad comments, the negative actions, much more heavily and more readily than we do the positive comments or experiences. (That's why it is good to count your blessings at the end of the day – to put the good things into the memory so that brain dwells on those all night.) It takes ten or twenty or a hundred (or a thousand, depending on the source of the negative) positives to outweigh the negatives.
- 3) Unexpected/disconfirmation – we remember that which is unexpected; the Pope who is willing to say that he is a sinner, who takes the bus, who eats breakfast with the custodial staff – that is not what we expect from a pope. Ask, “What is the expectation?” How can I unsettle that expectation? Parishioners who go to Florida, mission priests who tell the message in a new way, alternate sources of information. Get youth out of their comfort zone; do something different when you preach or teach. (Not all unexpected is helpful – be sure the “unexpected” furthers your goal. “Bad memorable” is bad.)
- 4) Concrete/real-life related. Use all senses: Dessert and a drink or the smell of mint tea and the tang of blueberry pie. Does this pertain to me/my life situation? In our over-communicated society, we tune out what does not pertain to us – may study it for the test, the confirmation class, but it doesn't stick. Why not? It doesn't hit what we value; just doesn't matter – boring....
- 5) Tie in and then stretch – to motivate – there are NO Unmotivated People! tie into what they value; what do they hold dear? And how can I stretch that to take them further, deeper, richer? The gospel stretches by its very nature. What do they value and how can I tie into that, but not leave them there?
- 6) What is the one simple big idea? How will you pass that on?
- 7) Be credible. Our culture has a “who says?” attitude. Where is the source of authority for the internet generation? Marketers say that sources of authority are coming closer to home. That opens tremendous opportunity for the impact of a caring and connected teacher, preacher, parent, or friend.
- 8) Tell the story of beauty of goodness, of sacrifice, of noble adventure, of fervor, of commitment, of loyalty, of solidarity
- 9) Be there: interpersonal skills of focused attention, two-*second* eye contact, one-minute listener; don't be somewhere else, be there. Multi-tasking doesn't work. Be there.
- 10) Be passionate about it yourself – like Jeremiah, have “fire in your bones” – I cannot hold it in; be the person that they want to be; passion is not tacked on, but a deep interior fortitude and conviction.

At the sign of peace at Mass, be there – give focused attention, smile in the eyes, pass God's peace to another.

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Upcoming book: *Connecting Pulpit and Pew: Breaking Open the Conversation about Catholic Preaching* at <http://www.litpress.org/Products/3769/connecting-pulpit-and-pew.aspx>

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