

# AN INVITATION TO LIFELONG FORMATION

Diocese of Bridgeport



CATECHETICAL TASK FORCE FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

09.19.2017



# A MOMENT OF RENEWAL

My Dear Friends,

In accord with the mandates of the Fourth Diocesan Synod, the Catechetical Task Force was established in October 2015. Over a period of eighteen months, the committee met to recognize the good work happening in faith formation in our parishes and schools and to recommend new models of ministry to achieve the renewal called for in the Synod's instructions.

At its initial meeting, it became clear that the Synod's mandated eight-month timeline was too brief and a longer period of time was necessary to reach its goal. The committee also realized that virtually every aspect of faith formation needed to be evaluated. That is, for a true renewal of catechesis in the Diocese of Bridgeport, faith communities must be challenged to reimagine formation at every stage of development.

This is not a moment of judgment in the history of our diocese – but a moment of renewal. What can we do better to bear great fruit? What can we do better together?

In the pages that follow, you will find a call for renewal. The Task Force began by looking at what the voices in formation are saying today. What does the landscape of parish life now look like? What are the great models of formation we see as possible? Many of you were among those voices.

In this invitation, we offer indicators of effective pastoral ministry and recommendations on how to implement new ideas. We offer a chance to do an honest assessment of what is bearing fruit and what is not bearing fruit in our parishes. We invite those parishes that have not already done so to spend the next several months assessing their entire catechetical enterprise. Then, we invite you to let the Office of Faith Formation help you create a multi-year plan for renewal. Start with whatever you want – elementary, youth, adolescent, marriage, baptism, or RCIA, or, start by embracing the invitation to develop lifelong formation in your parish and reimagine everything at once.

If you are convinced that your faith formation offerings are adequate, then ask yourself how you go from good to great. The indicators and recommendations throughout this document can help.



This time next year, every parish should be looking at what we are doing to reimagine faith formation. But please, let us not duplicate work. Let us learn from each other, share resources with each other, and undertake this renewal together.

We come to this moment in the life of the diocese in profound humility, knowing that we cannot reimagine faith formation on our own. The work is yours, O Lord. The faithful are yours, O God.

Let us pray for the courage to take an honest look at how we communicate the faith with others. Let us pray for the wisdom to see beyond what we have always done and look to what is possible. Finally, let us pray for strength to make changes where change is required.

**Only then will we truly be renewed.**

*Thomas J. Faggiano*



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# TOWARD LIFELONG FAITH FORMATION

To accomplish its work, the Task Force divided its members into four teams (research, assessment, encounter, and accompaniment). The assessment team launched an online survey that included feedback from more than three quarters of our parish religious education leaders. As the survey raised more questions than it answered, a supplemental survey was developed, this time directed to *all* ministry leaders. Highlights of the findings of both surveys are included on page 11 but a more detailed report can be found online at [www.formationreimagined.org](http://www.formationreimagined.org).

The research team looked extensively at models of ministry from across the country to discover what other parishes and schools had found to be effective tools for ministry at all stages of development. A recommended list of those programs can be found online at [www.formationreimagined.org](http://www.formationreimagined.org). It is important to remember that the recommendations of the Task Force are model-agnostic. No program or model can do everything. We also acknowledge that each faith community is different; each has a unique history and context. Thus, no single model can bridge this diversity completely. The encounter and accompaniment team developed suggestions for parishes and reviewed every recommendation through the lens of encounter and accompaniment. (See the inset box on page 33 for more information.)

The more the committees met, the more it became obvious that parish ministry leaders must make the intentional shift from maintaining programs to establishing relationships and creating more opportunities for ministry that feeds the entire community. Thus, a renewal of catechesis gave way to a call to reimagine everything. We are excited to submit this invitation of lifelong formation to the people of the Diocese of Bridgeport. Though it stands on the shoulders of many other attempts, programs, and structures from our diocese's rich history, it also stands apart. As you read through this invitation, you will notice that it is designed to help our faith communities assess their current efforts and then decide for themselves the appropriate next steps. The Task Force and the diocesan staff stand ready to help our ministry leaders implement the recommendations you choose to follow.

Community is a process. It begins with recognizing the diversity of the people gathered around the table. It involves calling forth those gifts and realizing that no one can work alone to accomplish all that must be done. Invite and empower those in the pews (and those who should be) to be the change agents in the parishes. Establish a sense of urgency. Sound the alarm. Announce the Good News. Above all, remember the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: "Trust in the slow work of God."

We know that renewal will take time, but doing nothing is not an option. We invite you to entrust all this work to Our Lady, even as we work side by side to reimagine faith formation and change the face - and the future - of ministry in the Diocese of Bridgeport.





# WORDS MATTER: REIMAGINING PARISH STAFF

BY PATRICK DONOVAN

A theologian once shared at a conference I attended that we train church leaders to work on toasters when the Church is actually a cat. A toaster can be taken apart, parts can be replaced. Try taking a cat apart—the organism is dead. It may be a crude and crass image, but it raises some interesting questions.

Is the Church merely an assembly of parts, as most programs treat it or is it an organism that when “broken” requires healing that avoids the disassembly of the cat. Thomas Aquinas understood this. Even today, many think of Aquinas as cerebral and scholastic (in academic terms). His theological writings, while logically laid out, also reveal a thinker in tune with the entirety of his senses. Some scholastics worked on toasters. Aquinas worked on cats.

With this image in mind, let us look at the staff of a parish when it comes to faith formation, religious education, and pastoral ministry with young people.

To start, this passage from paragraph five of the National Directory for Catechesis has long been problematic.

*The single most critical factor in an effective parish catechetical program is the leadership of a professionally trained parish catechetical leader.*

Why the problem? What's wrong with education? Nothing. The problem came about when some thought the passage gave permission for a shift in the language used to refer to the person who has long been known as the Director of Religious Education. Instead, DREs began to be called PCLs, or parish catechetical leader. While that new language did not necessarily take hold in The Diocese of Bridgeport, it bears mentioning.

Why? Because it is difficult to square with this passage from paragraph 225 of the General Directory for Catechesis (emphasis added).

*The catechetical tasks proper to the presbyterate and particularly to parish priests are...to promote and to discern vocations to the service of catechesis and, as catechist of catechists, attend to their formation by giving the greatest attention to this duty.*

For those who find it easy to get lost in the alphabet soup of ministry in the church, consider that the *General Directory for Catechesis* is published by the Congregation for the Clergy. It was last updated in the late 1990s. The *National Directory for Catechesis* is published by the US Bishops (and bishops of other countries) and is meant to serve as a companion to the GDC and *localize* the GDC for the needs of a particular country. The NDC in the US was last updated in 2005.

At issue is this conundrum: if the parish priest is the “catechist of catechists,” how can the director of religious education be the “parish catechetical leader?” True, there can be more than one “parish catechetical leader,” but you see the issue the language raises.

To make matters more confusing, several parishes and dioceses across the country have begun in recent years to call only those with advanced degrees in theology a “director of religious education,” while relegating those who volunteer or serve without advanced degrees as “coordinators of religious education.”

Meanwhile, across the parish parking lot, the coordinators of youth ministry continue to be called “coordinators” no matter how many degrees are earned. Worse still, too few parishes have put resources towards engaging young people into the life, mission, and ministry of the parish.

Youth Ministry Coordinators never minded because a coordinator *coordinates*. By definition, this person serves as the one who organizes the parish's response to the needs of young people. A director, on the other hand, is, by definition, “a person who is in charge of an activity, department, or organization.”

If we are to reimagine faith formation, and if this *reimagination* is going to call for us to renew catechesis at every level of ministry, is there not value in the conversation about who does what in a parish setting?

First, let us take the phrase “religious education.” Do we teach religion or theology? Do we want young people and their parents to encounter the person of Jesus, or simply learn facts about the Church? It seems clear that the former is preferred while the latter is reflective of our lived narrative. If we favor opportunities that form our faith, why not call it this? Why not let religious education give way to faith formation once and for all?

Second, assuming we are brave enough to make the leap to faith formation, do we want to pay attention only to certain age groups? Surely for faith formation to be effective, it must stop being episodic, punctuated occasionally by sacraments. Rather, it must be connected to life, permanent, lasting, and yes, lifelong.

Third, once upon a time the associate pastor (think: Bing Crosby's Father O'Malley) was assigned to keep the young people off the streets. Founded in Chicago in 1930 by Bishop Bernard Sheil, the first efforts in youth ministry in the modern era began when CYO became an alternative to following the likes of Al Capone. Generations later, the U.S. Bishops took up the call and used the term “youth ministry” for the first time in their 1976 document, “A Vision of Youth Ministry.” Modern day youth ministry uses that document's revision, aptly named, “Renewing the Vision” as its cornerstone.

Comprehensive youth ministry is not the same as youth group. There are young people who are active in the parish who will never join a group. The kiss of death for any ministry to young people is to require membership. Ministry that is comprehensive and effective is outwardly mobile. We have to reimagine our language. Effective pastoral ministry with young people can lead to vibrant faith communities, but it also



requires us to think about what we mean by “young people.” Any teacher or parent will tell you that waiting until a child is 12 or 13 to begin teaching something important is absurd. So why do so many parishes wait until then to invite young people into the life, mission, and ministry of a parish?

We must reimagine youth ministry so that our definition of young people extends from the time of reception of First Eucharist into young adulthood. If young people are old enough to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, *there should be ways we can engage them in the life, mission, and ministry of the parish.* If young adults are to be encouraged to stay active in their parishes, they, too, should be welcomed and encouraged to share their gifts.

The intention here is not to broaden the job descriptions of parish staff, but to broaden the vision of the entire parish. In fact, what we suggest above does not go far enough. To be truly effective, we must go back to Baptism preparation. No longer can we prepare parents to bring their infants to the Church for Baptism, only to ignore them until it is time for Reconciliation and First Communion. If we really want to be honest, we should back up to Marriage Preparation and help these potential parents to see the bigger picture.

You can see how easy it is to keep going in circles.

But words matter. Formation matters.

Moving forward, the Task Force recommends that all parishes recruit a coordinator of lifelong faith formation with specialization in various ages and ministries. One can oversee marriage and Baptism prep while another ministers to, with, and for our most senior adults. One may coordinate the team that forms the faith of all parish members while another will animate the parish's pastoral response to the needs of young people – socially, spiritually, physically, emotionally, and more. To set the example, you will find the diocesan changing its language as well, modeling what ought to be true for parishes.

While the preference will always be to have those on staff who have demonstrated a commitment to learning by earning advance degrees, the Task Force recognizes that this is not always a possibility. Filling these important positions with paid staff is also a challenge, though that, too, remains the preference.

Working together, these coordinators assist the *catechist of catechists* in sharing the faith and transforming the faithful. In fact, the entire parish staff, along with the well-formed volunteers, must work together to meet the needs of the faithful. Responsibilities must be shifted and shared. Silos must come down. Dots must be connected.

To reimagine something means to reinterpret in an imaginative way; to rethink. So while we are rethinking formation, let us also rethink roles and responsibilities.







# YOUTH MINISTRY AND FAITH FORMATION: THE POWER OF *AND*

BY PATRICK DONOVAN

Over the span of the last century, a great debate took place among the scientific community. Is light a particle or a wave?

Studying the properties and components of light, scientists discovered that, depending on the circumstances, light could behave as either particle or wave. In time, however, with more research and more observation, the scientific community settled on a new answer: light could be both. That is, light is a particle *and* wave. Einstein called this “a new kind of difficulty... two contradictory pictures of reality...where neither of these two definitions fully explains the phenomena of light, but together they do.”

A particle, it seems, is a clearly defined unit, with boundaries and specific properties. A wave, on the other hand, is more fluid; it moves across space, and transports energy through matter. Imagine a rope laid on the ground. If you pick up one end and jerk it with an up and down motion, you can observe the energy of that motion traveling down the length of the rope. The energy moves as a wave. Thus, a wave involves moving energy through particles *and* a wave must have particles to move. Particles must have waves in order to move. The *and* is important.

## What does this have to do with reimagining faith formation?

For years, religious education has been seen as a program. Formation in this vein has a beginning and an end, a registration and a conclusion. There were boundaries in which we operated: preparation for couples wishing to have their baby baptized included two 90-minute sessions, for instance. The parish religious education classes began on Sunday, September 17, and concluded on Sunday, April 30, as another example.

At the same time, youth ministry (or for many parishes unable to update their lexicon: *youth group*) was less a program and more a series of activities. Membership was limited to those who showed up and one adult or a small team of adults was thought to be able to meet the needs of the variety of young people who gathered.

## Where is the *and*?

Reimagining faith formation requires we understand both

religious education (or more appropriately titled, faith formation) and youth ministry as two elements of the same goal. Both have to do with helping to identify the movement of God in the lives of our young people. Both include moments of catechesis, socialization, and worship. To use Einstein's rationale: neither fully answers the needs of young people, but together they do.

## This reimagination requires:

- Recognition by parish leaders that we need adults who will form our young people theologically *and* socially
- Coordinators of faith formation and youth ministry who collaborate *and* communicate regularly
- An understanding by everyone in a parish community that *all* are called to be a youth minister *and* a catechist

We can no longer think of faith formation as a program stuck in a classroom. Formation of young people includes *all* young people *and* their families. The role of the Director or Coordinator of Religious Education must now include everyone in the parish and this will require a new energy and enthusiasm. Youth ministry is not just fun and games. In fact, it never was. The life of the parish is the curriculum of the parish's ministry to, with, and for young people. The person who animates the parish's response to the needs of young people must be well formed and well grounded. Whereas no one expects the DRE to teach all sections of faith formation, an effective youth ministry must include a team. The days of “youth groups” gives way to “groups of young people” where we recognize that young people are everyone's responsibility, passing on the faith belongs to us all, and the answer to “How many young people are involved in youth ministry?” must always, *always* be “all of them.”

As we look to a future where faith formation has a new beginning (birth or, perhaps early childhood) and an end (natural death), we must also look to the day when youth ministry is understood as an ongoing integration of the life of a young person and the presence of God in their lives. As we accompany young people on their journey of faith, we form them spiritually and in respond to their needs emotionally, physically, and psychologically. Particle *and* wave. Faith formation *and* youth ministry.

Yes, light is a particle *and* wave. Neither fully describes or defines. Youth ministry *and* faith formation lead young people to discover that they are in relationship with Jesus Christ. Neither fully describes or defines.

But both lead to the Light.



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This report is rooted in many of the same principles that guided the Synod. Specifically, three principles guided our work.

**The principle of subsidiarity:** It is not the intention of this task force to decide anything for parishes, schools and local communities; that rightfully belongs to these communities. To help you assess what you currently offer, we have included indicators for effective pastoral ministry and recommendations on how to achieve the effectiveness described herein. Parish leaders would be well served in choosing what works best in their own faith community from these lists.

From the parish level, the next logical step for shared ministry is the new deanery structure in the Diocese of Bridgeport. This new structure, established in April 2017, consists of nine communities of parishes. These are grouped by geography and are designed to promote fraternal support and collaboration among the priests and parishes of a particular deanery. Under the leadership of Deans, collaboration among the parishes of deaneries will be fostered.

Beyond parishes and deaneries, this report makes specific recommendations for the diocesan offices and staff. If there are programs or services that *could* be offered on the diocesan level that would benefit parishes and local communities, those items *ought* to be offered. For example, smaller faith

communities may not be able to afford large-scale events with nationally known speakers. Hosting such events at the diocesan level shares the burden of planning and paying for such events but still benefits local communities of faith. We hope you will be as excited as we are about some of the many ways we hope to support your good work.

**The principle of creativity:** Synod members suggested, “The Diocesan Curia, parishes and schools must creatively respond to the changing demographics in Fairfield County and the needs of our people.” The committee not only thought outside the proverbial box, we often set the box completely aside to think creatively about how we parishes can recreate faith formation. We interviewed dozens of people across the country and asked, “If you had a chance to reimagine faith formation within a community, what would it look like?” We believe the recommendations of this report will offer creative ways for our faith communities to meet the needs of the faithful.

**Principle of connectivity:** The principle of connectivity reminds us that we share in the responsibility to help those we serve make the association between *what we learn* and *how we live*. In short, everything we do in our parish or in our diocese should help people see how they are connected to a faith community. What the diocesan staff offers must be connected back to local faith communities. What local faith communities do must be connected to one’s personal faith journey. How we can work together and support this principle is at the root of all that this report offers.





## NAMING THE PROBLEM

While it is true that many parishes are doing faith formation well, few parishes have taken faith formation beyond the standard classroom model. For generations, the current model of religious education assumed that the faith of the family unit was alive and well. Religious education, be it in the parish parochial school or in the parish religious education program, was intended to *supplement* the faith practices at home, not replace it. The Task Force recognized several issues:

- The classroom model is not all that effective in helping young people retain the faith, but this is how our buildings and textbooks are structured, so how do we meet that challenge?
- Families have changed over the last several generations. More and more families are what society would name, “nontraditional.” The Task Force rejected that term but wanted to be sure to identify the unique living situation that many families face.
- The cultural milieu has changed. Pluralism and relativism reign supreme and facing that reality is on the minds of parents and teachers as they seek new ways to share the faith.
- Life in Fairfield County provides its own challenges. We welcome the very wealthy and the very poor to our parish communities. For some leaders, we must find the balance between attitudes of entitlement among some and the choice to feed a child or educate a child among others.
- Every parish is different. Every family is different. How do we reimagine faith formation while recognizing that one size will never, ever fit everyone?

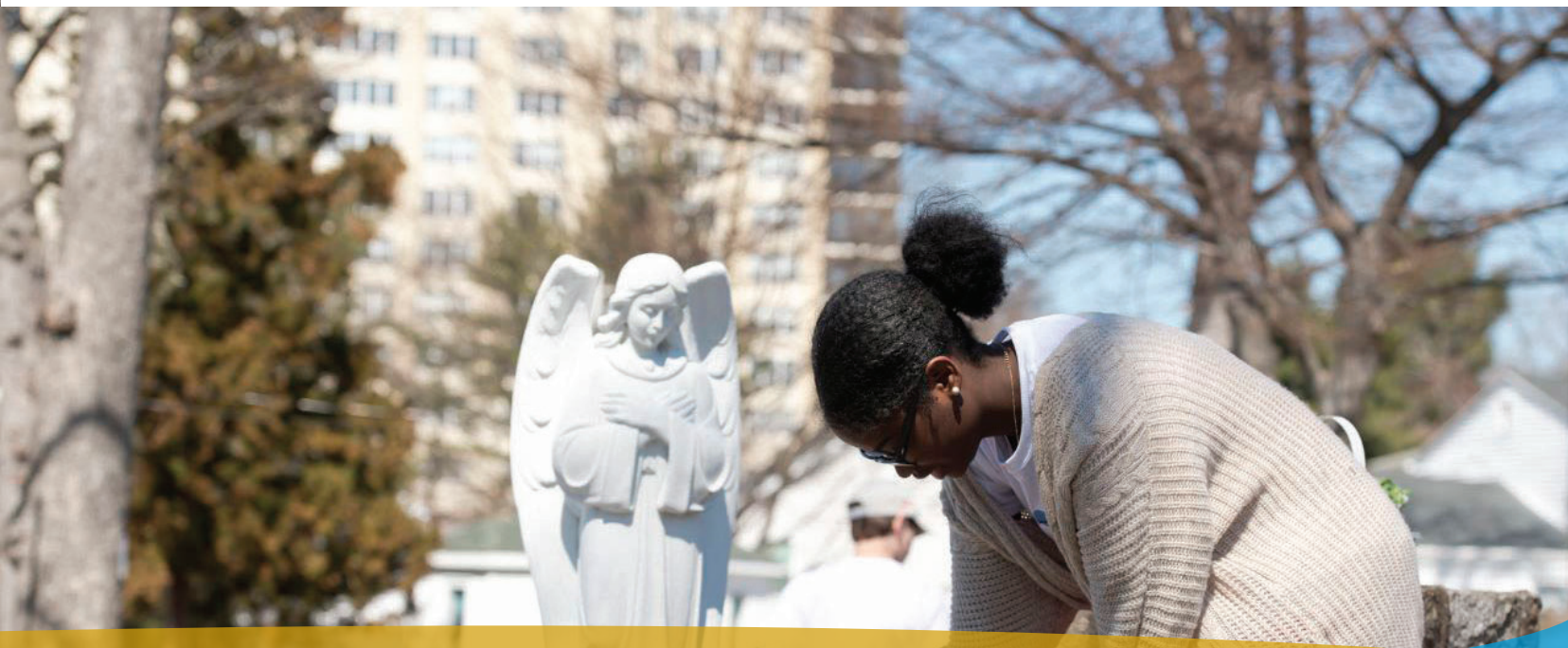
## FINDING THE SOLUTION

If we are to be instruments of change in this world and in the lives of those around us, we must rethink everything. Not our core Catholic beliefs, of course, but how we live and share those beliefs. This goes far beyond the hour many of us spend at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days and asks how faith informs our head and motivates our heart. To do this, we have to challenge the culture of the *status quo* that exists in many of our faith communities. Phrases like, “We’ve always done it this way?” and “Why do we have to change?” have no place in this new reality. As Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon (this) complacent attitude.” Indeed, the Holy Father invites “everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.” (EG, 33)

The truth is, everything is on the table.

That truth worries people. Stability is comforting. But the call to shift the paradigm and refocus our efforts on new and exciting ways to engage others in the faith is required if we have any hope of passing the faith on to the next generation. In 1976 John Westerhoff asked, “Will our children have faith?” It remains an important question. In 1983, however, Walter Brueggemann, changed the question and asked, “Will our faith have children?” That simple play on words changed the conversation. Suddenly, the conversation became less about the concrete and more about the abstract. Conversation about transmission became conversations about transformation.

Rather than spend time lamenting failed models of ministry and discussing the reasons young people and adults leave the Catholic Church, the Task Force focused on ways to improve. The recommendations here are rooted in a myriad of studies, research, and conversations with ministry professionals. We believe they create a path ahead that is both ambitious and manageable.



# ABOUT CULTURAL DIVERSITY

One of the ways we hope to achieve lifelong formation is to build communities where diversity is welcomed and valued and where the faithful are seen as equal partners in the Gospel message. This is best reflected in the text that follows, which is part of a formation plan offered by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The program is called *Intercultural Competencies* and will be offered in the Diocese of Bridgeport in the coming months.

For intercultural ministry to be effective, it will need a lived spirituality to support it. It is one thing to have knowledge, ability, and skills in the area of intercultural relations, but it is quite another to be motivated to act on what one knows.

In Module Five of the program, the USCCB offers this commentary:

There is a pattern found in immigrant communities that cuts across particularities. This pattern involves the stances taken in first and second generations.

"First-generation" people are those who immigrate in adulthood. Their life patterns and language skills are already well in place before they arrive in a new land.

"Second-generation" people include those who arrive in the new country as infants or children and those who are born in the new country. Their developmental patterns and language capacity are shaped by the new country more than those of the first generation.

Because their developmental years are already behind them, the first generation tends to view and interact with the new culture through the lens of their home country. They will often struggle to keep those values and to transmit them to their children.

The second generation finds itself caught between the world of their parents and the culture of the land where they are growing up. This may lead to conflict at home with their parents. They sometimes do not speak the language of their parents well, and they find themselves preferring to speak the language of the new country. They may reject patterns of the parents' culture (such as having their marriage partner or their profession chosen

by their parents). This is especially the case when the home culture of their parents is community-minded, and the children find themselves living in a predominantly individualist culture.

Outside the home, the second generation may not receive acceptance from their peers because they are "different." They may speak the language of the dominant culture with a slightly foreign accent. They may be profiled as "foreign." Being caught in between cultures can create special challenges for the second generation, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood as their adult identities begin to coalesce. This reality poses significant challenges for youth and young adult ministries in immigrant settings.

Effects of this conflict are sometimes seen in the third generation (i.e., the children of the second generation), especially when the second generation has tried to jettison the cultural identity of their immigrant parents. The third generation may become especially interested in the culture and even the language of their grandparents, causing tension between the third and the second generation.

Language is always an important factor, and it is an index of where the first and the second generation locate themselves vis-à-vis the two cultures.

Therefore, to serve effectively, parishes might consider:

- Articulating a vision of ministry based on ecclesial integration and inclusion;
- Fostering the inculturation of the Gospel in all cultures;
- Planning with the people, not for the people;
- Broadening your understanding of ministry groups, programs, and structures, and cast a bigger net;
- Empowering people from different cultures and ethnicities into leadership positions.

Source: USCCB, *Intercultural Competencies*

More resources available online at [www.formationreimagined.org](http://www.formationreimagined.org)





## SURVEY BACKGROUND

The Catechetical Task Force Survey was developed to obtain a better understanding of the needs of Directors of Religious Education/Faith Formation throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport.

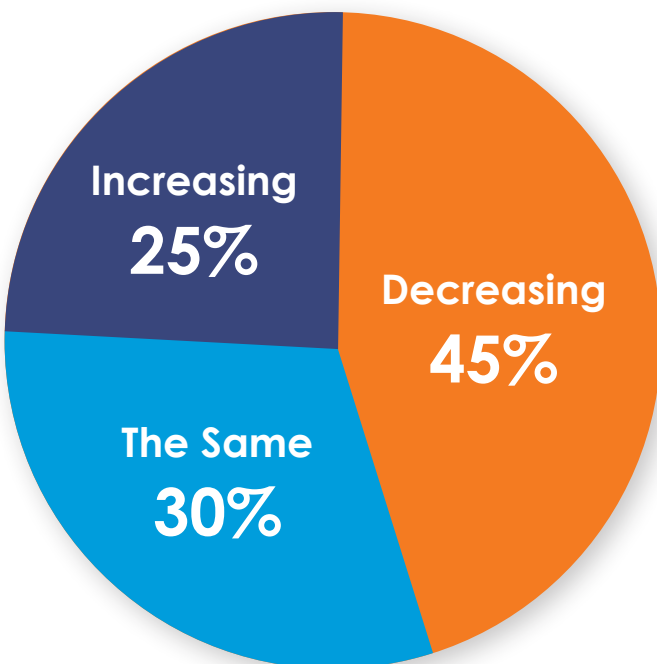
A telephone survey was drafted, reviewed, modified and approved by the CTF. Interviews were conducted via telephone from May to August 2016.

Fifty-six of 78 (72%) parishes participated in the first survey. More than 80% of our parishes were represented in the second survey, conducted in November 2016.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

Parishes reflect a wide range of student enrollment at all levels. There are also variances in the types and lengths of programs provided, the curriculum used, etc. In other words, there is no single "persona" to define a "typical" parish.

Nearly twice as many parishes report decreased student enrollment overall (45%) versus those that report an increase (25%).



Where enrollment is increasing, in nearly every case it is due to a direct action by the parish in creating/revising programs or parish clergy taking an active, outreach role.

## INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

- An active, comprehensive ministry to young people enlivens a parish, therefore, more should be done by the diocese to help parishes develop ministry teams that can make this happen

- Parishes that have pre-school ministry are three times more likely to report that these families attend Mass "regularly"
- Revised sacramental guidelines for First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation were requested by more than half of respondents
- The diocese should offer more formation for religious educators, catechists, and youth ministry leaders
- The diocese should create an online community where ministry leaders can share ideas
- The Task Force should make recommendations that allow parishes to tailor suggestions to their own unique realities
- The diocese should offer resources specific to every stage of faith formation
- Improve communication between the diocese and parish leaders
- The Task Force should create indicators and recommendations for parishes to use in assessing and reinvigorating their faith formation efforts

## WE HEARD YOU

The members of the Task Force reviewed the survey data carefully and personalized their work to fit the comments made by respondents. On the followings pages you will find indicators and recommendations for every stage of faith development. These are based on the latest research, your comments, and conversations with ministry professionals across the country. We are excited to share this information with you.

## INDICATORS & RECOMMENDATIONS

You will notice as you read through this report that we have listed indicators and recommendations for every stage of faith development. Indicators are ways to measure whether ministry at that particular stage of development is effective. These indicators are rooted in proven best practices and studies of effectiveness. The recommendations are suggestions your parish can use to meet all the indicators listed. Both indicators and recommendations are important as both offer sound advice on reimagining faith formation in our parish faith communities.

*Welcome to this new adventure in the life of the Diocese of Bridgeport. Enter the journey with us as we reimagine formation together.*

# BAPTISM: BACK TO THE BEGINNING

When we are baptized as infants, the priest or deacon takes a moment at the end of the Rite to bless the parents of the newly baptized.

He first blesses the mother, who holds the child in her arms, then the father, and, lastly, the entire assembly with these words:

To the mother, he prays: "God the Father, through his Son, the Virgin Mary's child, has brought joy to all Christian mothers, as they see the hope of eternal life shine on their children. May he bless the mother of this child. She now thanks God for the gift of her child. May she be one with him (her) in thanking him forever in heaven, in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He then turns to the father: "God is the giver of all life, human and divine. May he bless the father of this child. He and his wife will be the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith. May they be also the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith by what they say and do, in Christ Jesus our Lord."

## First Teachers

Parents are the *first teachers* of the faith. As we reimagine faith formation, we must ask ourselves if we are giving these parents the tools necessary for being *first teachers*.

If the answer is no, let us begin by reimagining this important touchstone with families.



## Indicators for Effective Baptismal Preparation (for infant baptism)

*(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 36.A.1)*

1. We provide catechesis to both the parents and godparents preparing for the Baptism of infants.
2. We teach parents and godparents that baptism is the basis for the whole Christian life.
3. We provide parents and godparents with resources for helping raise their children in the Catholic Church.
4. We welcome the newly baptized and their families into the parish community.
5. We involve parents and children in the parish life after their baptism by connecting them with other members of the community.
6. We help godparents understand their role in the life of the baptized.
7. We recognize the need for support before, during, and after the Sacrament of Baptism within the larger community and we work intentionally to make sure this happens.

## The Godparent Question

*The following is taken from the General Introduction of the Rite of Christian Initiation, paragraphs 8-10*

It is a very ancient custom of the Church that an adult is not admitted to baptism without a godparent, a member of the Christian community who will assist him at least in the final preparation for baptism and after baptism will help him persevere in the faith and in his or her life as a Christian.

In the baptism of children too, the godparent should be present to be added spiritually to the immediate family of the one to be baptized and to represent Mother Church. As occasion offers, he or she will be ready to help the parents bring up their child to profess the faith and to show this by living it.

At least in the final rites of the catechumenate and in the actual celebration of baptism, the godparent is present to testify to the faith of the adult candidate or, together with the parents, to profess the Church's faith, in which the child is being baptized.

Pastors of souls should therefore see to it that the godparent, chosen by the catechumen or by the family, is qualified to carry out his proper liturgical functions as specified above. The godparent should:

- be mature enough to undertake this responsibility,
- have received the three sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist;
- be a member of the Catholic Church, canonically free to carry out this office. A baptized and believing Christian from a separated church or community may act as a godparent or Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent, at the request of the parents and in accordance with the norms for various ecumenical cases.



## Recommendations for Effective Baptismal Preparation (for infant baptism)

### Invite couples into the greater parish community

- Announce the names of the newly baptized in the bulletin and on the parish website
- Baptize within Mass, whenever possible, to engage the wider community and introduce new families
- Activities tailored to families with young children (parish social events, Children's liturgies, spiritual events with babysitting, etc.)
- Prayer partners for families of newly baptized child
- Encourage parish staff to display their baptismal certificates as a sign of that event which empowers and calls them into ministry

### Help families to connect with other families in parish

- Invite families of those newly baptized to gather once or twice each year
- Find or form opportunities for young families to meet and interact with couples who are at same stage in their life
- Family coffee hour or brunch
- Holy hour in evening with babysitting
- Mom and Dad night out (parish event with babysitting) to let parents socialize

### Partner parents of newly baptized with mentor families

- Various stages of family life and number of children
- Dialogue regarding common family problems, how they overcame struggles, real life problems, etc.

### Spiritually renew each individual of the couple as well as the couple together

- Provide opportunities for spiritual renewal for the couple individually such as a men's group or women's group
- Re-invigorating their relationship as husband and wife – revisiting marriage preparation now that their family dynamic has changed

### Support for families before baptism of their child

- Material and spiritual support for parents after birth of a child
- Prepare and deliver meals
- Offer to help with children at Mass
- Investigate ways to help with transportation to Mass
- Assisting with mother's and baby's needs at Mass (seating to nurse a baby, changing area, toddler friendly books, etc.)

### Support for families after baptism of their child

- Activities, resources, prayer opportunities for couple prayer as well as activities to enrich the husband's and wife's personal spirituality
- Establish a team of volunteers to follow up at three-, six-, nine-, and twelve-month intervals to offer prayerful support to the parents of newly baptized
- Marriage enrichment activities (date nights, retreats, service work, etc.) – ideally affordable and with childcare factored in
- Provide each family of newly baptized a symbol of our faith to serve as a silent homily in the home
- Revisiting the topic of natural family planning

### Use media and technology to keep them informed and connected

- Provide electronic resources about parenting, sharing faith, and developing a language of faithfulness in the home
- Text alerts with prayers, articles, or short reflections
- Periodic surveys to see their current needs
- Ability to opt into other groups (working parents, stay at home parents, parents of a child with special needs, parents of a school-aged child, etc.) as they move into those phases

### Effectively communicate with couples on a regular basis

- Social media
- Website
- Email/text blasts

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*It can be said that children at birth are like a mass of flesh. Their mind does not emerge from the matter in them except with time and becomes refined only little by little. As an unavoidable consequence, (they) ... are not yet able by themselves to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims. They need good guides and visible angels to help them learn these things. (St. John Baptist de La Salle, Meditations For The Time Of Retreat, 197.1)*

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## Catechesis in Special Situations

(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 50)

The community of the baptized comprises many different groups of believers, each of whom have the right to a sound and adequate catechesis. Some of the groups in special situations for whom catechetical programs might be developed in certain circumstances include (but are not limited to) the marginalized (e.g., immigrants, refugees, the chronically ill, prisoners), college students, young adults, military personnel, unwed parents, married couples (with or without children), couples in mixed marriages, the divorced, the divorced and remarried, the widowed, same-sex partners, and so forth. Catechetical programs for these groups can be adapted to the specific needs of those being catechized.

# EARLY CHILDHOOD

Early Childhood follows from infant baptism through the enrollment of the child into an organized faith formation at a parish. We know from our research that parishes that engage this age group are three times more likely to retain the family of these children in the life of the parish. In fact, the same recommendation was made in 1976 by the bishops of the United States. Unfortunately, early childhood formation was never widely adopted. We seek to stem that tide and encourage all parishes to engage this forgotten demographic.

## Indicators for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Early Childhood

*The numbers after each indicator refer to the corresponding Task of Catechesis, which can be found on page 32*

1. We offer opportunities for young children (ages 0-5) to encounter Christ through age appropriate activities that are family and parish-based. (1,5,6)
2. We provide opportunities and environments to teach children how to pray, learn different prayer styles and encourage community prayer experiences with their families and friends. (4)
3. We help children to understand scripture through reading, picture, the environment and their senses. (1)
4. We offer service opportunities for both families and children, to begin to understand what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. (5,6)
5. We appropriately prepare parents to comprehend, pass on and continue to cultivate the faith in their child. (5,6)
6. We provide events where parents and their children can learn and share their faith together. (1,5)
7. We accompany parents and their children on their journey of faith and introduce them to ways of following the life of Jesus. (1,3)
8. We assist parents on how to teach and model a moral life to their children so they become images of Christ to each other and in the world. (3)
9. We celebrate the contributions of parents, their children and the milestones they achieve in the larger parish community. (5)
10. We continue to offer ongoing parent formation so they can continue to be the primary educators of their children in the faith. (1,5)



The book, *Growing Up Religious*, was written by Robert Wuthnow to discover the nature of the new winds blowing in the spirituality of Americans. Though it was written a generation ago, its lessons hold true today. Wuthnow reports that adults who are still “religious” (attending services, practicing their faith) have four things in common: they were taught to pray as children, there were sacred objects in their homes, their families ate meals together, and their parents told of their own faith experiences.

“Says Wuthnow, *Effective religious socialization comes about through embedded practices that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines, of eating and sleeping, of having conversations, of adorning the spaces in which people live, of celebrating the holidays, and of being part of a community. Compared with these practices, the formal teachings of religious leaders often pale in significance. Yet when such practices happen, formal teachings also become more important.*

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## Recommendations for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Early Childhood

### Early Childhood Catechesis strives to assist each child to deepen their faith by:

- Developing a sense of wonder about the world around them
- Becoming more sensitive to the spiritual
- Helping them become aware of the attitudes and elements of worship
- Helping them become aware of the presence of God in themselves, others and the world
- Developing an awareness of the community of Church and their belonging
- Experiencing the joy and ease of spontaneous prayer
- Coming to know that God is loving and caring
- Helping young children begin to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ

### Early Childhood Catechesis encourages parents to grow in their faith by:

- Showing that parent involvement is essential for the development of the child and family as a whole
- Inviting parents to attend early childhood faith formation instruction sessions along with the DRE/CRE and other volunteers to assist them in passing on the faith
- Helping parents to realize they are the primary religious educators and are responsible for instilling religious and spiritual values to their child

- Encouraging parents to practice their faith with their children both within the Church community and at home

### Early Childhood Catechists and Parents assist children to deepen their faith by:

- Encouraging Catechists and parents to work as spiritual teams to help all family members grow in their faith
- Allowing parents to take on catechetical roles within the Faith Formation program to sharpen their skills and to help build community
- Encouraging ongoing instruction and participation in Faith Formation sessions with both Catechists and parents attending for support and perspective on what is needed
- Encouraging all those involved in the formation process to pray, spend time in community and support each other's role

### Early Childhood Catechesis strives to encourage participation from the parish as a whole by:

- Promoting and encouraging the parish community to support those family-based activities that develop a deeper understanding of God with children
- Assisting in developing and supporting a Sunday Pre-School formation program if one does not exist
- Supporting the recruitment of an Early Childhood Coordinator to focus strictly on formation of young families and their children
- Utilizing all resources available, i.e. diocesan personnel, website, educational workshops, etc.

## CHILDHOOD

In addition to regular, ongoing formation, young children should be welcomed into the life, mission, and ministry of the parish community. True, these youngsters are likely not suited to be lectors, but there are ways to include them. Consider asking adult volunteers to invite their children to serve beside them, where appropriate. Create opportunities for young children to hold doors, distribute programs, straighten the chairs and/or pews when Mass is ended. The earlier young children are invited to be at home in a parish, the more likely these same children will feel at home.





## Indicators for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Childhood

1. We offer opportunities for children to encounter Christ through Vacation Bible Camps and other large church experiences. (1,5,6) (see *Encounter* section)
2. We provide opportunities and environments to teach children how to pray, learn different prayer styles and encourage community prayer experiences. (1,4,5)
3. We help children to understand scripture through reading and picture. (1)
4. We offer service opportunities for both families and children, to begin to understand what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. (1,5,6)
5. We appropriately prepare children and their families to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation. (2,3) (see section on *Reconciliation*)
6. We appropriately prepare children, and their families, to receive their First Holy Communion. (2,3) (see section on *First Holy Communion*)
7. We provide events where parents and their children can learn and share their faith together. (1,5,6)
8. We accompany children on their journey of faith and introduce them to a life of following Jesus. (1,2,3,4,5,6) (see *Accompaniment* section)
9. We introduce children to the moral life by teaching them to model themselves after Christ. (1,3)
10. We celebrate the contributions of children and their milestones in the larger parish community. (5)

## Recommendations for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Childhood

### Provide opportunities for children and families to learn about and experience their faith

- Incorporate children and their families into the celebration of Mass, i.e. bringing up the gifts, lecturing, etc.
- Announce and welcome any new families that are attending/have joined the parish community
- Have regular gatherings for children and their families other than Faith Formation Sessions for building community, i.e. movie nights, potlucks, breakfasts, etc.
- Have regular Family Faith Sharing times to show where God is present in their lives
- Provide family service events at the parish and in the community, i.e. serving/assisting meals at a local shelter, food/clothing drives, writing letters/drawing pictures for the home bound/nursing homes, etc.

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“ Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach* ”

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## Indicators for Effective First Reconciliation Preparation

(*National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)*, 36.B.2)

1. We help children understand God's unconditional love for us.
2. We help children recognize the presence of good and evil in the world and their personal capacity for doing good or bad.
3. We help children recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from their parents and others close to them, but from God.
4. We help children to understand the experience of sorrow for their sins.
5. We help children to memorize and understand the Act of Contrition.
6. We help children to understand the basics of going to Reconciliation.

## Recommendations for Effective First Reconciliation Preparation

### Educate children, their families and the faith community on the meaning and benefits of the Sacrament

- Help them to distinguish between what is good and evil according to Church teachings
- Define what sin is and how it breaks our relationship with God who loves us
- Show how to express sorrow for our sins by a good examination of conscience
- Experience the steps of making a proper confession and why this is necessary
- Show why frequent confession is important to our spiritual health
- Have and promote additional times to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

## Indicators for Effective First Communion Preparation

(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 36.A.3a)

1. We see celebration of First Communion as an opportunity to catechize the whole community on the sacrament and to invite all to regular reception of the Eucharist.
2. We help children to understand the Eucharist as a sign of the Father's love for all of us.
3. We help children to understand that what appears to be bread and wine are actually the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, of Jesus Christ.
4. We help children and families to actively participate in the Mass through an understanding of its different parts.
5. We help children to receive Christ's Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner.
6. We invite children and their families to attend Mass every Sunday and on Holy Days of Obligation and to pray daily.

## Recommendations for Effective First Communion Preparation

**Educate the children, their families and the parish community on the meaning and benefits of the Sacrament**

- Show why the Sacrament of Communion is the ultimate sign of God's love for us
- Explain why we need to receive Communion often and in a state of grace
- Provide children and families proper formation on the Mass, its parts and its importance for us
- Explain when and how basic bread and wine becomes the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus and how it nourishes us spiritually
- Instruct the children and review with their parents the proper way to prepare and receive the Sacrament
- Promote and encourage Mass attendance weekly and on Holy Days of obligation

## EARLY ADOLESCENTS

Early Adolescents follows from the reception of First Reconciliation and First Communion into the often very difficult middle school years. Parishes will find that if they wait until young people are in middle school (or worse, high school) before inviting them into the life, mission, and ministry of a faith community, those young people will have already lost interest. Besides ongoing, gathered faith formation opportunities, it is important to, in the words of St. John Bosco, "Go out to where young people are and invite them to arrive where they ought to be." Never, ever, underestimate the power of personal invitation.

### Indicators for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Early Adolescents

1. We offer opportunities for young people to encounter Christ through retreats, rallies, camps and other experiences. (1,5,6)
2. We invite young people to be connected to the diocesan Church and to participate in regional and national gatherings. (5,6)
3. We introduce young people to the fundamentals of prayer and praying together. (1,4,5)
4. We introduce young people to the basics of Scripture. (1)
5. We introduce young people to service experiences. (6)
6. We encourage young people to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis. (2,3)
7. We introduce young people to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. (2,4)
8. We encourage young people and their families to participate in the Mass on a regular basis. (2,4)
9. We offer opportunities for young people to become further initiated into the Catholic Church through the sacrament of Confirmation. (1,2,3,4,5,6) (see Confirmation section)
10. We provide events where parents and their young people can participate and explore the faith together. (1,5,6)
11. We accompany young people on their journey of faith and introduce them to a relationship with Jesus. (1,2,3,4,5,6)
12. We do not wait until young people are in middle school to invite them to be involved in parish life. (5)
13. We celebrate the contributions of young people and their milestones in the larger parish community. (5)
14. We give care to minister appropriately to those from different cultures by offering opportunities to learn about and participate in diverse cultural celebrations. (5,6)
15. We introduce young people to opportunities that allow them to be a part of the larger parish community. (5,6)
16. We have clergy and religious that are visible and present to our young people. (5,6)
17. We recognize the opportunities to catechize young people outside of the classroom setting. (1,5,6)
18. We seek the best resources to form and catechize our young people. (1)
19. We reach out to young people intentionally, not accidentally. (5)
20. We pastorally care for young people in times of crisis. (5,6)

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All are hoping, searching, and wanting to see Jesus. For this reason, believers, especially catechists, must not only 'speak' of Christ, but in a certain sense, 'show' him to others. Our witness however would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated His face. (Pope Francis)

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## Indicators for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Adolescents

1. We offer opportunities for young people to encounter Christ through retreats, pilgrimages, conferences and other experiences. (1,5,6)
2. We invite young people to be connected to the diocesan Church and to participate in regional and national gatherings. (5,6)
3. We give young people the skills and opportunities to pray together. (1,4,5)
4. We give young people the skills and opportunities to read and study Scripture together. (1,5)
5. We invite young people into opportunities to serve others and invite them to reflect theologically about these opportunities. (1,4,6)
6. We offer opportunities for young people to learn and apply Catholic Social Teaching to their daily lives. (1,6)
7. We ask young people to speak for their own needs and advocate for their peers. (5,6)
8. We offer opportunities for young people to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis. (2,3,4)
9. We offer opportunities for young people to participate in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on a regular basis. (2,4)
10. We catechize young people to fully understand the Mass. (1,2,4)
11. We encourage young people to participate in Sunday Mass on a weekly basis. (2,4)
12. We offer opportunities for young people to become fully initiated into the Catholic Church. (1,2,3,4,5,6) (See Confirmation section)
13. We recognize the opportunities to catechize young people outside of the classroom setting. (1,5,6)
14. We seek the best resources to form and catechize our young people. (1)
15. We empower parents to be partners in ministry through formation and resources. (5,6)
16. We offer various opportunities for young people to learn about their faith, wrestle with moral questions, and discuss with their peers. (1,3,5)
17. We accompany young people on their journey of faith by continuing to challenge them to live out their lives as disciples of Christ and apply moral principles to their everyday lives. (1,3,4,5,6)
18. We reach out to young people intentionally, not accidentally. (5)
19. We pastorally care for young people in times of crisis. (5,6)
20. We celebrate the contributions of young people and their milestones in the larger parish community. (5)
21. We recognize that all parishioners have an essential role to play in ministry to young people. (5)
22. We give care to minister appropriately to those from different cultures by offering opportunities to learn about and participate in diverse cultural celebrations. (5,6)
23. We welcome young people into leadership roles within the parish. (5,6)
24. We encourage young people to look at the ways in which God may be calling them to serve his Church, including vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life. (5,6)
25. We have clergy and religious that are visible and present to our young people. (5,6)



***“A parish that is both Catholic and effective in its ministry welcomes all young people regardless of how they identify themselves as children of God.”***

## Recommendations for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Early and Older Adolescents

*Pastoral Ministry with young people is defined as a parish's response to the needs of young people and how to involve them in sharing their gifts with the larger community. As a parish, it is necessary to determine the specific needs of the young people in your community. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to ministry with young people. With that in mind, the following recommendations can help in determining the needs of your young people and building a ministry in response to those needs.*

### Form a Ministry Team

- A youth ministry team comprised of parish leadership, parents, other parishioners and youth leaders helps to involve the whole parish community.
- This team needs to be properly formed in understanding the goals and components of comprehensive ministry to young people.
- The role of this team will be to assess the needs of the young people of the parish community, formulate a unified vision ministry to young people and help build a comprehensive program from middle school to high school including Confirmation.
- The team can also educate the other parish councils on their ministry to young people.

### Adopt a Comprehensive Vision for Ministering to the Young People of your parish

- "The most effective catechetical programs for adolescents are integrated into a comprehensive program of pastoral ministry for youth that includes catechesis, community life, evangelization, justice and service, leadership development, pastoral care, and prayer and worship (NDC 48.D)."
- Many parishes have middle school religious education, Confirmation preparation and high school youth ministry as three separate and distinct ministries. A comprehensive program looks at how young people are formed from when they enter 6th grade all the way through high school graduation.
- Confirmation preparation, in particular, should be seen as a part of the larger parish ministry to young people not as a separate program entirely. This helps prevent the idea of

trying to catch up the young person or form them entirely in one or two years.

- Comprehensive ministry also looks for opportunities outside of the regularly scheduled religious education classes or youth nights to form young people.

### Empower Parents to be Partners in Ministry

- Effective ministry to young people happens when parents are engaged in the formation of their children. Here are some ways to partner with parents:
- Have parent information sessions at the beginning of every year
- Effectively communicate calendars and event dates with parents
- Provide faith formation opportunities for young people and their parents to come together. For example: family movie nights, family prayer nights, holiday celebrations, family mission nights, and family reconciliation sessions
- Send home resources to parents on topics being covered with questions for them to ask their children on the way home
- Provide service projects that invite the whole family to come together

### Incorporating Youth into the Life of the Parish

- Youth are specifically invited to take on leadership roles in the celebration of the Mass through altar serving, being members of the choir, lectors, ministers of hospitality, and (assuming they are 16 years of age, Confirmed, and properly formed) Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
- Youth should be invited into leadership roles for parish events such as parish festivals, Stations of the Cross, fish fries, bake sales, pancake breakfasts, ethnic and cultural celebrations, etc.
- A mature and well formed young person could represent and advocate for the needs of their peers on the parish council.
- The milestones and achievements of young people should be recognized to the whole parish community. These milestones could be: academic, athletic or artistic achievements, scouting awards, and graduations.





# CONFIRMATION PREPARATION

How do we make sure that Confirmation is not viewed as graduation from faith formation? First, we stop assuming young people will want to leave the parish.

If we have made a concerted effort to help young people feel at home, be involved, and understand that they are valued members of the community, chances are they will stay. If we call them by name, include them, and listen to them, chances are they will know we will miss them if they fail to show up for a time.

Confirmation is a time of great hope. It is recognition of the wonderful gifts already present in our young people. Like learning to drive a car, it is one of the many “happenings” in the lives of young people. As they learn to drive, the rest of their life does not cease to exist; instead, learning to drive is just one more thing on their list. Confirmation, while a special occasion, must be treated as another opportunity to grow in faith. If, however, we treat it as a last ditch effort to teach everything. If we make the preparation too long and the requirements too arduous, young people will not see it as one thing among many; they will see it as we have made it: a chore to survive.

Parishes would be well served by reimagining Confirmation prep so that it is an opportunity to *continue* a journey in the parish community, which began at baptism.

## The Role of the Confirmation Sponsor

The role of the Confirmation Sponsor involves much more than simply standing behind the Candidate as the bishop confirms. It is the beginning, or the continuation, or a lasting relationship of mentoring and guidance.

The prayers and support of the Sponsor are an important part of preparation for Confirmation, and helps the Confirmation Candidate live his or her baptismal promises both before and after Confirmation.

“Teens with parents who attend religious services more often and for whom faith is more important are more likely than teens whose parents attend less often and for whom faith is less important to be religiously devoted. (Christian Smith, *Soul Searching*, pg 111) In short, we get what we are.”

## Indicators for Effective Confirmation Preparation

(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 36.A.2)

1. We strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the parish community and the universal Church in those being confirmed.
2. We offer opportunities for parents, families and sponsors to be involved in the sacramental preparation process with the confirmandi.
3. We offer service learning opportunities where confirmandi learn that service is an attitude and a lifestyle rather than a task to complete.
4. We provide opportunities that nurture a deeper sense of spirituality with the confirmandi, such as retreats.
5. We incorporate sacramental preparation into the larger vision of ministry to young people.
6. We help the confirmandi understand the meaning and significance of their choice to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.
7. We help the confirmandi understand their giftedness and how they can serve the larger Church community.
8. We help our confirmandi understand the importance of attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
9. We help our confirmandi understand the importance of regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
10. We help our confirmandi understand that Confirmation more perfectly binds the baptized to the Church and enriches each person with the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that the individual can be a true witness to Christ.
11. We introduce confirmandi to the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
12. We help our confirmandi understand that through Confirmation they are fully initiated but not completely formed (provided that they have received Holy Communion).

## Recommendations for Effective Confirmation Preparation

### Incorporate Confirmation Preparation into a comprehensive ministry to young people

- Encourage them to participate in parish youth ministry events
- Provide opportunities to support their parish
- Provide year-round events: summer activities as well as school year
- Family service projects
- Build relationships between adult volunteers and youth
- Continually invite them to be involved
- Have young people who are already confirmed serve as mentors for current confirmation candidates

### Provide opportunities for the candidates to serve in the mission and ministries of the Church

- Have candidates take on faith formation projects for younger children
- Have representatives from different ministries come speak to the candidates about being involved in the parish
- Have candidates participate in liturgical roles and designated Masses
- Have other parishioners pray for and write affirmation letters to candidates

### Provide opportunities for parents, families and sponsors to be engaged in the preparation process

- Provide resources to start conversations between candidates and their parents and/or sponsors
- Provide a parent orientation packet or meeting
- Have parents participate in some preparation sessions
- Provide opportunities for parents to connect with other parents
- Provide parent packets for retreats with resources such as praying for your child or how to talk to them after the retreat experience

### Provide formation outside of gathered classroom time

- Formation is more than information. Find creative and unique ways to form young people during the preparation process
- Provide service learning opportunities where candidates serve together and reflect upon what they have done
- Provide opportunities for candidates to pray together such as Eucharist Adoration nights
- Encourage candidates to participate in diocesan or national events
- Require candidates to participate in retreat experiences

## CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND FAITH FORMATION

The parish community is the sacramental home for the faithful. It is surrounded by this community of believers where infants are baptized, young children receive their first Reconciliation and First Holy Communion, and where adolescents are Confirmed in their faith. A parish community is a place where families are invited to celebrate Sunday Mass together and it should be a place where young people are known and welcomed.

In addition to the primary community that is formed by a parish, there are other communities of faith that can be instrumental in the ongoing faith formation of our people. Such communities are formed in each of our Catholic schools. A strong Catholic school can (and should) provide the environment where faith is nurtured. A Catholic school should be a place of authentic witness to the power and presence of God in the lives of its students and faculty. A Catholic school, like a parish faith formation program, offers a safe space where young people can ask difficult questions and trust that the adults will answer honestly and, when the answer is unknown, will help the young person seek the Truth.

Still, it is essential that the leaders of the Catholic school community do all they can to connect young people back to the parish community, where the journey of faith began and where it will continue long after the students depart the caring environment the school provides.





# ADULTS

Much has been made of the language of young adults, adults, and even seniors. Though we mention both groups on the following page, these indicators and recommendations are meant to include all adults. Young adults must be welcomed into the community and their gifts nurtured. Our senior adults tell us that they do not want programs specifically for themselves, rather they wish to be included in life of the parish and not forgotten. People in between these two phases of adulthood tell us that small group faith sharing, movements like *Walking with Purpose* and the many Ecclesial Movements in our diocese, should be examined for the great communities they have become. We should learn from each other's successes and openly share ideas that work.

## Indicators for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Adults

1. We offer opportunities for adults to encounter Christ through parish missions, retreats, and the witness of other members of the community. (1,5,6)
2. We give adults the skills and opportunities to grow spiritually through private prayer, shared prayer, meditation and popular devotions. (1,3,5)
3. We give adults the skills and opportunities to study and reflect upon Scripture together as a community. (1,5)
4. We seek to empower adults to care for others, to reach out to those in need, and to educate adults on topics of peace, justice, and human dignity. (1,6)
5. We actively invite adults to regular reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation through penance services, frequent reminders and readily available priests to hear them. (2,3,4)
6. We offer opportunities and direction for adults to adore Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. (2,4)
7. We assist adults in participating fully, consciously and actively in the Mass through education and engaging liturgies. (1,2,4)
8. We offer opportunities and regularly invite adults to become fully initiated into the Catholic Church. (1,2,3,4,5,6) (see section on RCIA)
9. We offer opportunities and regularly challenge adults to learn and grow in their knowledge of the faith. (1)
10. We help form in adults a moral responsibility that allows them to apply Christian ethics, virtues and principles to moral decision making in their everyday actions of daily life. (3)
11. We give adults the tools to explore God's call to vocation through prayer, reflection and discernment. (1,4,6)
12. We actively invite adults to discern how they can use their gifts to actively participate in the life, mission and work of the Catholic Church. (5,6)
13. We give adults opportunities to explore how God is present in their own lives, the lives of others, and the world around them. (1,4,5,6)
14. We help adults understand how to be good stewards of their time, talent and treasure. (5,6)
15. We accompany adults on their journey of faith by inviting them to be a part of a ministry in which they feel at home. (5,6)
16. We properly prepare adults for the sacrament of Matrimony. (1,2,3,4,5,6) (see section on marriage prep).
17. We properly prepare adults to have their children baptized in the faith. (1,2,3,4,5,6) (see section on baptism prep)
18. We celebrate both the sacramental and personal milestones in the lives of adults and their families with the larger community. (2,5)
19. We offer opportunities for adults to celebrate their diverse cultures in the larger community through cultural celebrations. (5,6)
20. We give adults the tools and opportunities to live out their lives as disciples of Christ in the world today by sharing of their faith. (1,2,3,4,5,6)
21. We are intentional about making connections between the parish church and the diocesan and universal church. (5,6)



## Recommendations for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Adults

*(including welcoming new members to the community)*

### Provide opportunities to deepen their prayer life through various prayer experiences

- Private prayers and communal, shared prayer
- Retreats
- Spiritual devotions
- Scripture reading
- Reception of the sacraments
- Eucharistic Adoration
- Provide generation-specific opportunities and sensitivity to cultural diversity in the parish community

### Equip adults to live out lives of faith in their everyday lives

- Teach them how to explain their faith to those without it
- Show them how to apply Christian principles to moral decision making in their everyday actions of daily life

### Use media and technology to keep them informed and connected

- Text alerts with prayers, articles, or short reflections

- Periodic surveys to see their current needs
- Ability to opt into other groups (men's group, women's group, dads, moms, single parents, widows, etc.)

### Invite them into the greater parish community

- Help them identify their gifts and how they can be of service to the Church
- Make connections between their work, home, and parish life
- Host appealing events to various populations with appropriate timeframes (weekends vs. weekday evening vs. Skype, etc.)
- Unite with them in prayer during their good times and hard times
- Respond to their needs in times of crisis – loss of child, divorce, addiction, financial struggle, etc.

### Effectively communicate with adults on a regular basis

- Social media
- Website
- Email/text blasts

## A Word About Young Adults

*(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 48.C.)*

The most effective catechesis of young adults is integrated into a comprehensive program of pastoral care that understands the concerns of young adults and candidly addresses the questions they ask and the problems they face. The goals of such a comprehensive program of young adult ministry are as follows:

- To connect young adults with Jesus Christ, through spiritual formation/direction, religious education/formation, and vocation discernment.
- To connect young adults with the Church through evangelizing outreach, formation of the faith community, and pastoral care.

- To connect young adults with the mission of the Church in the world through forming a Christian conscience, educating and working for justice, and developing leaders for the present and future.
- To connect young adults with a peer community through developing peer leadership and identifying a young adult team for the purpose of forming faith communities of peers.

## The Wisdom of Age

*(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 48.B.)*

The practical experience, wisdom, attitude, and example of many older people make them especially valued gifts to the life of the Church. The catechesis of older people takes into account the diversity of their personal, family, and social conditions. The most effective catechesis for older persons occurs within the context of a comprehensive program of pastoral care specifically developed for and with them. Such programs should be built on several fundamental principles:

- Older people are providers, not simply recipients of pastoral care
- Older people themselves should help to identify their pastoral needs and decide how they are met

- Older people are as diverse as other generational groups, if not more so
- Older people need a mix of activities that connect them with each other as well as the larger faith community
- Spiritual health affects and is affected by the individual's physical, emotional, mental, and social health. While the faith community is especially concerned about meeting their spiritual needs, it cannot ignore these other realities.



# A WELCOMING COMMUNITY

The Rite of Christian Initiation is a proven method of welcoming those who are just coming to the faith, but what about those already here? How can parishes create a welcoming environment for everyone?

Here are just a few recommendations, courtesy of Diocesan Publications.

**Make a good first impression.** This starts with making sure your greeters actually greet people. Sometimes, greeters forget that what they are doing is absolutely vital to parish hospitality. Open the door as people walk in. If they know the person, greet them by name. Say, "Thank you for joining us today. We're glad you're here." It may not seem like much, but a couple of friendly faces as a person walks in go a long way in making someone feel "at home."

**Be kind to parents.** Soothing a crying baby is one of the hardest things for parents. They are trying to teach their young children how to behave at Mass, only to be given a look by someone in the pews around them. Kids are kids. They are going to be squirmy. They will talk when they are not supposed to. The best way for parishes to thrive and grow is to make sure young families are welcomed.

**Move over.** When the pews start to fill up, move over. Don't make the older couple crawl over you and your three kids to get into the pew. And be cheerful about it.

**Make parish registration a truly welcoming experience.** Hold off on the envelopes. Sit down with the person or family. Tell them they are welcome. See if they have any questions, not just about the church, but the area, if they've just moved. A welcoming gift is great: a parish directory and a crucifix are always nice.

More great resources are available at [www.formationreimagined.org](http://www.formationreimagined.org).

## Indicators for Effectively Welcoming New Members (RCIA)

*(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 35.A.)*

1. We recognize that Christian initiation is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life and so should include more than instruction.
2. We provide a parish formation process that includes four stages and the rituals that mark those stages.
3. We provide a parish formation process characterized by gradual conversion, ample use of Scriptures, systematic and comprehensive Catechesis, prayer and ritual celebrations and involvement of the whole parish community.
4. We provide sponsors who mentor catechumens through the initiation process.
5. We provide opportunities for catechumens to reflect upon the Word of God at Sunday liturgies.
6. We properly prepare candidates to receive all the sacraments of initiation. *(see sections on Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation)*
7. We provide opportunities for the newly initiated to understand and receive the sacrament of Reconciliation. *(see section on Reconciliation)*
8. We summon the catechumen to profess faith in the person of Jesus Christ from the heart, to follow him faithfully, and to become his disciple.
9. We gather the newly initiated periodically for mystagogia, including an anniversary Mass.
10. We incorporate the catechumens into the life of the Christian community.
11. We remember that an effective RCIA program need not follow the academic year and can begin at any time.



## Indicators for Effective Marriage Preparation

(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 36.C.2)

1. We provide couples with a marriage preparation program that systematically and comprehensively teaches about the Sacrament of Matrimony.
2. We encourage the care and concern of the whole Christian community for married couples by public recognition of couples planning marriage, modeling by couples in successful marriages, and supporting of couples in challenged marriages.
3. We assist the couple in deepening their understanding of the nature of Christian marriage as a covenant between a man and woman whereby spouses establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life that is ordered to the well being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children.
4. We clearly present the Church's teaching on the morally acceptable methods of regulating birth, such as NFP, and the immorality and damaging effects of artificial birth control.
5. We teach couples that fidelity, indissolubility, and openness to children are essential to Christian marriage.
6. We teach couples that the family is the first and essential center of faithful living, the domestic Church.
7. We help couples to understand that it is in the love and struggles of their marriage that a couple attains the holiness of their vocation.
8. We celebrate marriages in the larger community and invite newly married couples into the life of the parish community.
9. We provide ongoing support for couples after they have been married in the Church.
10. We offer couples the opportunity to share their story with others and build community among those being prepared for marriage.

### What is a Sacramental Marriage?

Sacramental marriage is the union of a baptized man and woman who freely enter into a loving covenant with each other in Christ. This covenant is modeled on the relationship between Jesus Christ and his Church. A sacramental marriage has three necessary elements: free consent, the affirmation of a lifelong, exclusive union, and openness to children.

## Recommendations for Effective Marriage Preparation

### Invite couples into the greater parish community

- Publish banns of marriage
- Public parish recognition of weddings and anniversaries
- Parish social events that encourage couple participation

### Help engaged couples to connect with other engaged couples in parish

- Find or form opportunities for engaged couples to meet and interact with couples who are at same stage in their life (planning a wedding, newly married, new families, etc.)
- Connect couples to the social and spiritual events throughout the Diocese for young adults or young couples

### Spiritually renew each individual of the couple as well as the couple together

- Provide opportunities for spiritual renewal for the couple together
- Provide opportunities for spiritual renewal for the couple individually such as a men's group or women's group
- Book as a gift at marriage preparation

### Link the engaged couple with mentor couples

- Various stages of marriage and years of marriage
- Dialogue regarding common marital problems, how they overcome struggles, real life problems, etc.

- Draw the couple into life of the parish through shared ministry or service with mentor couple
- Share about personal experiences/challenges/mistakes they made

### Support for couples after the wedding

- Activities, resources, prayer opportunities for couple prayer as well as activities to enrich the husband's and wife's personal spirituality
- Periodic "check-in" with couple, especially during first year of marriage
- Help couple to see the gifts they have to offer to the parish
- Marriage enrichment activities (date nights, retreats, service work, etc.)
- Respond to their needs in times of crisis – loss of child, marital struggles, addiction, financial struggles, etc.

### Use media and technology to keep couples informed and connected

- Text alerts with prayers, articles, or short reflections
- Periodic surveys to see their current needs
- Ability to opt into other groups (new parents, married couples after 1 year of marriage, working adults, etc.) as they move into those phases

“Few human joys are as deep and thrilling as those experienced by two people who love one another and have achieved something as the result of a great, shared effort. [Amoris Laetitia, 130]”



# THE CHANGING FACE OF THE CATHOLIC FAMILY

Once upon a time, the church building was not only in the center of town, but the faith community was the center of a family. Parishes were tied to cultures and ethnicities and families walked to Mass together.

Those days are long gone. Our parishes are ethnically and culturally diverse so we must reimagine how we can welcome our families to be the center of lifelong faith formation they are called to be. Saint John Paul II called the family, "the Church in miniature." How then, can this Domestic Church effectively accomplish this important task? Perhaps naming the current reality will help.

Holy Cross Family Ministries and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University teamed up for a four-part study on Catholic parents and families leading up the World Meeting of Families in September 2015.

Among the results:

- Catholic families are more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than the overall Catholic population. About 53 percent of all Catholic parents self-identified as Hispanic or Latino compared with 32 percent of all Catholics.
- Most Catholic children are being raised by married Catholic parents – about eight in ten Catholic mothers and fathers are married and less than 1 percent are widowed, while about 3 percent have never been married and 13 percent are single and living with a partner.
- Frequency of Mass attendance is similar between Catholic parents and all adult Catholics – about 22 percent – yet a larger proportion of Catholic parents attend Mass less than once a week. Catholic parents with three or more children are much more likely to attend Mass at least once a month.

- While more than 93 percent of parents say it is very important for their children to celebrate Sacraments, most Catholic parents do not have their children enrolled in Catholic school-based or a parish-based religious education programs. In all, more than two-thirds, 68 percent, do not have any of their children enrolled in formal Catholic religious education.
- About 66 percent of parents say that it is very important for their children to celebrate First Communion, while only 61 give the same importance to Confirmation.
- Overall, 71 percent of parents agree "somewhat" or "strongly" that prayer is essential to their faith. Only about 36 percent pray at least once a day, however. An additional 23 percent pray at least once a week.
- And when they pray, parents most commonly pray for the wellbeing of their families (83 percent). Only 16 percent of parents say they pray the Rosary at least once a month.
- More than four in ten Catholic parents read their church bulletin.

If faith formation is a family affair – and it should be – let us work together to embolden the families in our parish to take on this task. The face of our parishes continues to change. But our young people report that they seek the same thing our adults seek: consciousness of God, belonging to a community that welcomes them and values their input. As we look around, we realize that a new language gives way to a new concept of what is necessary. Because there has been a loss of a common community, a common culture, and a common vocabulary, we must reimagine faith formation and begin anew.

*\*Source: <https://www.avemariapress.com/news/2015/7/6/hcfm-cara-study-family>*

## NO FAMILY IS BROKEN

When a couple marries, no one expects the journey to end in separation or divorce. Parishes must be sensitive to the needs of those experiencing the pain of divorce or separation. Through support and empathy, prayer and spirituality, and service to others, these men and women find hope to begin the road to acceptance and healing.

Parishes are encouraged to offer opportunities for those affected by divorce or separation a place to meet, prayerful support, and opportunities for socialization.

Only by accompanying one another may we rediscover a deeper faith and renewed relationship with God.



## Indicators for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Families

1. We offer opportunities for families to encounter Christ through parish missions, opportunities to receive the Sacraments, prayer experiences, and the witness of other families of the community. (1,5,6) (see *Encounter* section)
2. We give families the skills and opportunities to create a home rooted in prayer through teaching them about family prayer and popular devotions in their home: the domestic church. (1,3,5)
3. We give families the skills and opportunities to study and reflect upon Scripture together as a family. (1,5)
4. We seek to empower families to live lives of service by caring for others, reaching out to those in need and educating for peace, justice and human dignity. (1,6)
5. We actively invite families to regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation through penance services, frequent reminders and readily available priests to hear them. (2,3,4)
6. We offer opportunities and direction for families to adore Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. (2,4)
7. We assist families in participating fully, consciously and actively in the Mass through education and engaging liturgies. (1,2,4)
8. We help form in families a moral responsibility that allows them to apply Christian ethics, virtues and principles to moral decision making in their everyday actions of daily life and to teach their children to do the same. (3)
9. We give families the tools to explore God's call for their vocation to marriage and to help their children discover their vocation through prayer, reflection and discernment. (1,4,6)
10. We actively invite all family members to discern how they can use their gifts to actively participate in the life, mission and work of the Catholic Church. (5,6)
11. We give families opportunities to explore how God is present in their own lives, the lives of others, and the world around them. (1,4,5,6)
12. We accompany families on their journey of faith by inviting them to be a part of a parish community that they feel at home in. (5,6) (see *Accompaniment* section)
13. We celebrate both the sacramental and personal milestones in the lives of adults and their families to the larger community. (2,5)
14. We provide support for families in times of crisis. (2,5)
15. We offer opportunities for families to celebrate their diverse cultures in the larger community through cultural celebrations. (5,6)
16. We give families the tools and opportunities to live out their lives as disciples of Christ in the world today by sharing of their faith. (1,2,3,4,5,6)
17. We are intentional about making connections between the parish church and the diocesan and universal church. (5,6)
18. We offer opportunities specifically for those who are divorced and/or remarried. (2,5)
19. We encourage and support vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. (2,5)

## Recommendations for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Families

### Provide opportunities to deepen their prayer life through various prayer experiences

- Private prayers and communal, shared prayer
- Retreats
- Scripture reading
- Reception of the sacraments
- Family Bible projects
- Eucharistic Adoration

### Equip adults to be primary educators of their children

- Teach them how to explain their faith to their children
- Show them how to apply Christian principles to moral decision making in their everyday actions of daily life – and how to teach their children to do the same
- Help them to have the answers to common questions of their children at various ages, especially on contemporary topics

### Use media and technology to keep them informed and connected

- Text alerts with prayers, articles, or short reflections
- Ability to opt into other groups (men's group, women's group, dads, moms, single parents, widows, etc.)
- Engaging resources for the home (book lists, recommended movies, etc.)

### Effectively communicate with couples on a regular basis

- Social media
- Website
- Email/text blasts

### Invite them into the greater parish community

- Picnics, social events, carnival, etc.
- Celebrate feast days together
- Unite with them in prayer during their good times and hard times
- Respond to their needs in times of crisis – loss of child, divorce, addiction, financial struggle, etc.



# ANSWERING THE CALL

All of us are called to serve one another. Some choose to serve Christ and His Church as men and women religious, as deacons, or as priest (in a diocese or a religious order). To these men and women, we offer this reflection. As they are part of the community of faith, they too are called to lifelong formation.

Our formation does not start or stop at some pre-determined age. Nor does it cease because we have spent many, many years studying the Church, Scriptures, or the life of Jesus. We continue to learn in a variety of ways all our lives. In many professions, such as lawyers and doctors, accountants and pilots, continued formation is not just encouraged, it is required. Though "formation" may not be the perfect word, it encapsulates best what we seek to promote: the formation of ideas, the continued gathering of knowledge, the forming of our consciences, and the many ways we encounter God through the community of believers.

Those tasked with the role of preaching must continue to hone their skills as storytellers and witnesses. Those who teach in our schools and universities must stay current to stay relevant. Though the sum of two and two may not change, the shifts in attitudes and experience of one generation to another can be seismic.

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“In the hidden recesses of the human heart the grace of a vocation takes the form of a dialogue. It is a dialogue between Christ and an individual, in which a personal invitation is given. Christ calls the person by name and says: “Come, follow me.” This call, this mysterious inner voice of Christ, is heard most clearly in silence and prayer. Its acceptance is an act of faith. (Homily of St. John Paul II, 2/10/1986)”

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As St. John Paul II wrote in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, “The ongoing formation of priests, whether diocesan or religious, is the natural and absolutely necessary continuation of the process of building priestly personality which began and developed in the seminary or the religious house with the training program aimed at ordination.” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 71)

There is a link, the great Pontiff wrote, “between formation before ordination to the priesthood and formation after ordination” (71). Breaking this link, “would (have) serious and immediate repercussions on pastoral work” (71). Though these words were written to priests and seminarians, the sentiment is the same for men and women religious the world over.

Pope Francis, echoing the words of his predecessor, reminded women in contemplative life that, “Formation, especially continuing formation, is “an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration”, and is grounded in the daily life of the community” (*Apostolic Constitution Vultum Dei*, 14). As we live, we learn.

As we seek to promote a culture of vocations in the Diocese of Bridgeport, we must remember that all of us – even the most educated – are called to continue to learn. Our diocesan catechetical mission will continue to count on the efforts of priests and religious men and women whose formation is overseen elsewhere, but whose charisms and talents help to enrich the lifelong formation of others and who, in turn, are continually inspired and enriched by the charisms and talents of their lay partners.

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“Be beacons to those near to you and, above all, to those far away. Be torches to guide men and women along their journey through the dark night of time. (Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei*, 6)”

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# EXPECTATIONS — A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

As part of their conversation, Task Force members discussed what parish members ought to be able to expect from their parish community and what parish communities ought to be able to expect from its members. We believe this list will help parishes and individuals understand that each plays an important role in the life, mission, and ministry of a faith community.

## What should I expect from my parish community?

1. A welcoming, Catholic community, rooted in the Eucharist
2. Beautiful and reverent liturgical experiences that engage the head and the heart
3. Opportunities to use my gifts and talents in service of the parish and wider community
4. Accompaniment through life's joys and struggles, celebrations and heartbreak
5. Broad accessibility to reception of the sacraments, including the sacrament of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist
6. Parish leadership that is well-formed for their ministry
7. Parish staff that is friendly and knowledgeable
8. Opportunities to pray for the needs of others and learn more about my faith
9. Opportunities to support the community through prayer and tithing
10. Opportunities to join with others in prayer and formation
11. Regular, ongoing communication about the life of the parish
12. Opportunities to practice being a missionary disciple

## What should my parish expect from me?

1. Weekly, active participation in Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation
2. Ongoing prayers for my parish leadership and community
3. A willingness to get involved in the life of the parish
4. Active participation in events offered by the parish
5. A willingness to participate in all areas of ministry
6. A willingness to learn more about my faith
7. A willingness to share my faith with others
8. A willingness to serve others in the name of the parish community
9. A willingness to reach out to others, welcoming them to join our faith community
10. A willingness to support the parish financially
11. An attentiveness to the communication from the parish community
12. A willingness to live my faith in my daily life

“A new evangelization is synonymous with mission, requiring the capacity to set out anew, go beyond boundaries and broaden horizons. The new evangelization is the opposite of self-sufficiency, a withdrawal into oneself, a status quo mentality and an idea that pastoral programs are simply to proceed as they did in the past. Today a business as usual attitude can no longer be the case. Some local Churches, already engaged in renewal, reconfirm the fact that now is the time for the Church to call upon every Christian community to evaluate their pastoral practice on the basis of the missionary character of their program and activities. (Synod of Bishops XIII Ordinary General Assembly, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith*, Lineamenta, #10)

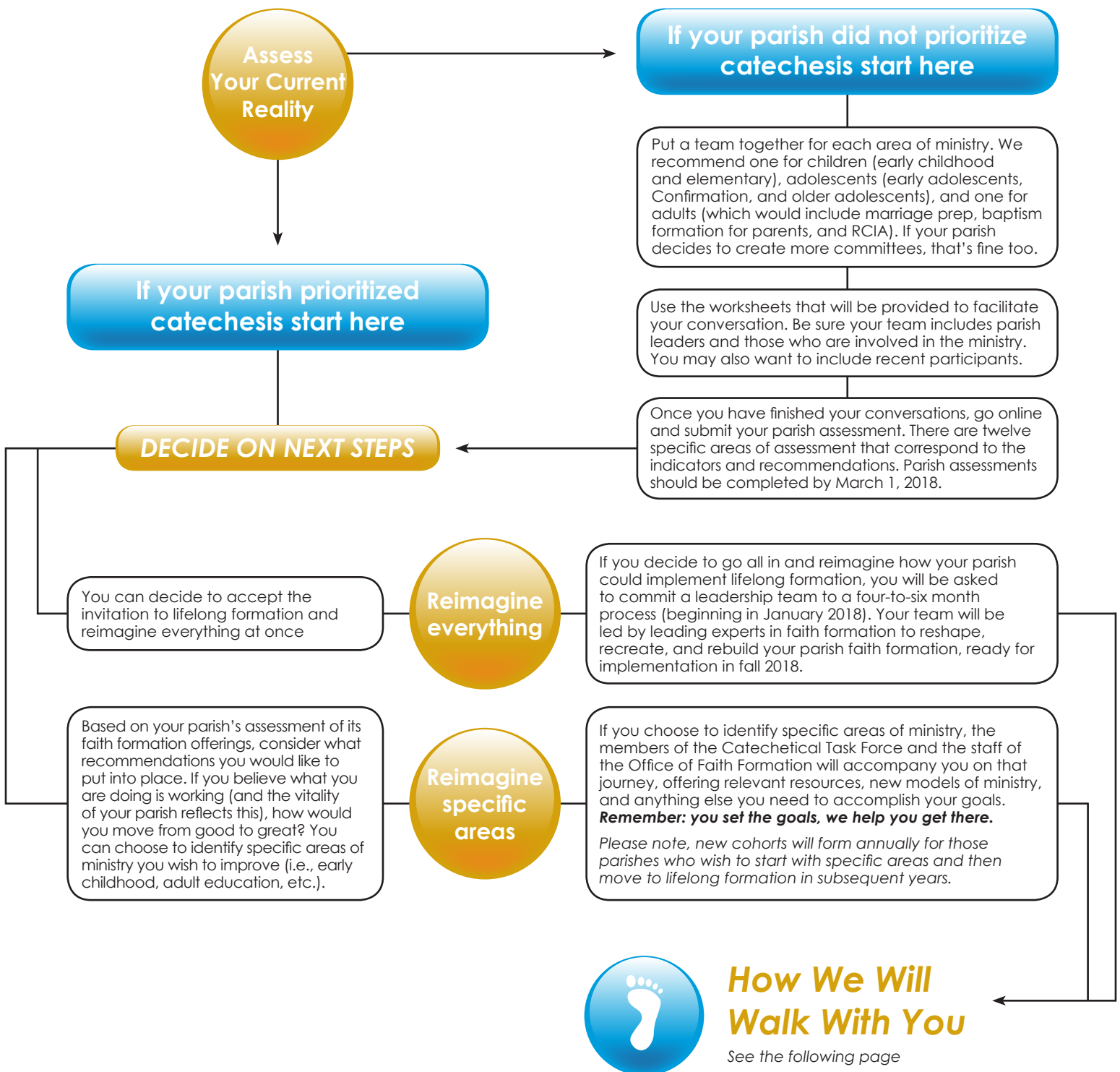
”



# WHAT'S NEXT?

When you choose to remodel the place where you live, you can either choose to remodel a room or you can choose to remodel the whole house. The same is true for reimagining faith formation: you can choose to take one aspect (i.e., families, adolescents, etc.) and concentrate only on that piece of the puzzle. Or you can choose to take everything on all at once. No matter what you decide, just like remodeling a house, reimagining faith formation is likely to be messy and take longer than you anticipated.

Through the diocesan strategic planning process, forty-eight parishes named catechesis and education as a priority for their parish pastoral plan. The path forward for these parishes is a bit different since they have already named catechesis and education as a need in the local faith community.





## How We Will Walk With You

Listening to the comments of the survey respondents, it is clear that our parish leaders want resources and events that can help improve our shared ministry. To that end, we offer the following ways the Catechetical Task Force and the Office of Faith Formation staff is committed to accompanying our parish ministry leaders.

### Online

- Parish leaders will be able to sort by indicator, recommendations, or areas of ministry leadership and find valuable resources to reach your goals.
- Models for specific stages of development are available online, sorted by age of participants.

### In Parishes

- Office of Faith Formation staff and CTF members will visit each parish in the weeks following the submission of self-assessments to listen to your needs and help plan a response.
- Conversations will be held as assessments are submitted to discuss those recommendations that parishes will not be able to put into place but which could be implemented on the deanery level.



## WITH GRATITUDE

For eighteen months, these task force members have met on a regular basis to help create this report. We express our sincere appreciation for their commitment and dedication to renewing faith formation in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

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# APPENDIX

## FOUR PILLARS OF THE CATECHISM, THE SIX TASKS OF CATECHESIS AND CORRESPONDING FAITH FORMATION STANDARDS

Pillars of the Catechism (Topics)	Six Tasks of Catechesis	Faith Formation Standards to be learned across all grade levels
<b>I. The Profession of Faith</b> (Creed and Sacred Scripture)	<b>1. Knowledge of the Faith</b>	Students explore, profess, and reflect on our Catholic faith, which is the content of God's revelation found in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and lived out in the Creed and Church doctrine.
<b>II. The Celebration of the Christian Mystery</b> (Liturgy and Sacraments)	<b>2. Liturgical Education</b>	Students recognize the presence of Christ and enter into communion with Him through active, full and conscious participation in the Liturgical celebrations and Sacraments of the Church.
<b>III. Life in Christ</b> (Personal and Social Morality)	<b>3. Moral Formation</b>	Students develop a moral conscience that is informed by Church teachings and conformed to Christ, modeled in a personal life of virtue, and demonstrated in service of the Gospel's demands for society.
<b>IV. Christian Prayer</b>	<b>4. Learning to Pray</b>	Students experience and engage in Catholic expressions of prayer to deepen their relationship with God and the Church.
<b>I. &amp; III.</b> (Church History, Ecclesiology, Communion of Saints, Parish and Family/Domestic Church)	<b>5. Education for Community Life</b>	Students study and participate in the life and mission of the Church—the Body of Christ and the community of believers—as expressed in the Church's origin, history, ecclesiology, the Communion of Saints and their family, the domestic Church.
<b>I. &amp; III.</b> (Vocation, Discipleship, Stewardship and Evangelization)	<b>6. Missionary Discipleship and Service</b>	Students acquire and demonstrate skills to recognize their gifts from God and their vocation to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed in the world.

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## WHAT IS ENCOUNTER?

Encounter is defined as “an unexpected or unplanned meeting.” In the religious sense, it is exactly that, an unexpected, unplanned encounter with a person, but not just any person; it is an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Encounter is the first step in the process of missionary discipleship. As we see in the Gospels, the twelve apostles encountered Jesus Christ, they were called by Him, and they followed after Him.

One of the first ways that we will encounter Jesus Christ is through our parents, grandparents, or other family members. We see the witness of a person of faith and, in that witness, we recognize something that we desire for ourselves.

## WHAT IS ACCOMPANIMENT?

We are relational beings. We have been created in the image and likeness of God<sup>1</sup>, who is communion of Love,<sup>2</sup> and ‘we are all called to the same end: God himself’<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, in this journey towards our common goal, community is an essential requirement. God gives us His grace to strengthen us and the gift of our brethren so that we may accompany each other in order to respond to our universal vocation to holiness.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus himself shows us the importance of community and of accompanying one another. When Jesus selected the men who would become the Apostles, “he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.”<sup>5</sup> Years later, on the evening of Easter Sunday as two disciples “were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.”<sup>6</sup> Aware of our Lord’s desire to be with his Apostles and disciples, and affirming that “Jesus Himself, the Good News of God, was the first and the greatest evangelizer,”<sup>7</sup> one must examine and understand the activity of accompaniment in order for the Church to better catechize and share the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ. As members of the faithful carrying out the mission of Christ’s Church, we can never do so alone or by our own activity. “In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> The hearers of the proclaimer’s message require accompaniment just as the first disciples were accompanied by the Lord on their journey and mission.

<sup>1</sup> See Gen 1:26-27

<sup>2</sup> See 1 Jn 4:8

<sup>3</sup> CCC 1878

<sup>4</sup> See CCC 1879

<sup>5</sup> Mark 3:14-15

<sup>6</sup> Luke 24:15

<sup>7</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 7

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 12





# THE PATH TO MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

## ENCOUNTER

These are experiences throughout our lives in which we **encounter the person of Jesus Christ**, most often in and through the community of believers. These encounters awaken the gift of faith, which is infused into our souls at baptism and must always be nurtured.

## GROWING IN FAITH

Like a flame that must be tended in order to grow, the gift of faith is cultivated in many ways. Participation in the Sacraments, engaging Sacred Scripture, personal prayer, and the personal witness of others help to **deepen one's encounter with the Lord** through the power of grace. Other ways by which the flame of faith can be strengthened include beauty, art, literature, cultural and ethnic celebrations of faith, and works of virtue and goodness.

## MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

When we know, love, and serve the Lord, when we live out His call to **spread the Good News**, and when we invite others into relationship with the person of Jesus, this is missionary discipleship. It is a lifelong process, always in need of renewal and formation.

## WHERE DOES MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP BEGIN?

A lifetime relationship with the Lord in and through the Church that deepens with the passage of time.

## WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

As our personal encounters with the Lord continue, there will come a time when we are invited by the Church to embrace an explicit faith in Christ. For Saint Peter, this moment of conversion occurred when he answered the question posed by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?"

The call of each disciple is to follow Peter and, with mind, heart, and soul, **affirm faith in Christ and embrace the personal conversion** that such faith demands. Such a confession of faith deepens over time and is strengthened by the community of believers.

## COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH

We do not make this journey alone. We recognize that we are members of the **Mystical Body of Christ**. It is a communion that extends through time and space, built upon the witness of the Apostles. It is communion that finds its greatest expression in the Eucharist.

## EVANGELIZING CATECHESIS

When we fall in love with the Lord, our hearts desire two things: to **know everything** about Him and to **spend time** with Him. Through catechesis, we deepen our knowledge of the Lord through the study of Sacred Scripture, the Church's Tradition and the truths of our Catholic Faith. We spend time with the Lord through participation in personal and communal prayer, especially the celebration of the Eucharist. By deepening our knowledge and love for the Lord, a deep desire begins to grow in our hearts. It is a desire to share the joy of knowing the Lord with others. We wish to invite others to know and love the Lord as we do. Now, the door to missionary discipleship has begun to open.

## ACCOMPANIMENT

**Accompaniment includes being both a leader and a follower.**

Even as we accompany others, we are strengthened by the faith of those around us.

To help illustrate the path to missionary discipleship, The Leadership Institute has created an infographic outlining this lifetime relationship. Copies are available. Please email [institute@diobpt.org](mailto:institute@diobpt.org).

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