

THE WORD OF GOD

IN THE LIFE
AND MISSION
OF THE CHURCH

Faith Formation at St. Patrick 2008... a white paper.

In reflecting back on my first year at St. Patrick the idea of writing a white paper to the parish about the state of faith formation seemed like a good idea. To sum up the previous year I paraphrase the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who said, "The only constant is change." And the biggest change from the past year might just surprise you. After months of reflection, the adoption of Liturgical Catechesis as the parish-wide model for faith formation was the big change from last year.

What is Liturgical Catechesis?

One of the most important and identifiable things we do as a Catholic Christian community each week is to come together at Sunday mass or *liturgy*. The *catechesis* or formation that is connected with liturgy, liturgical catechesis, has three broad pieces.

First is the formation that prepares us to participate more fully and deeply in the Sunday liturgy. This is accomplished in a number of ways. Proclaiming the Sunday readings for the coming weekend and discussing them as our opening prayer for every parish meeting and formation session begins to prepare us to hear the Word of God on Sunday. Learning a new response or song before mass prepares us to participate more fully on Sunday. Other examples include formation sessions for lectors, extraordinary ministers of communion, altar servers, and ministers of hospitality. All these prepare us to encounter God at mass.

Second is the formation intended by the liturgy itself. The rituals we experience at mass from a baptism to a funeral rite are all instructive. Whether we participate in a Rite of Anointing or are witnesses to the Rite of Acceptance of a new catechumen coming into the church, we learn something about ourselves, our faith, and our community. The preeminent example of this form of catechesis or formation occurs every Sunday when we actively listen to Father's sermon or homily. In short, at mass and other liturgies we learn what it means to live our lives as Christians.

The third formative piece of the liturgy is the experience of liturgy itself. We know that when we come together at mass that Jesus is present with us in a number of ways. As a sacramental people we

believe that this encounter with the divine can change who we are in both large and small ways. We encounter Christ. We connect or re-connect with the body of Christ. Through this encounter and connection we are changed and strengthened. And we are sent forth to be Christ for the world.

We come together as a Christian community rooted in the teachings of Jesus to pray and worship with each other. We are fed and nourished. We go forth to build the Kingdom of God.

So what changes come from this model?

The structure changes. Because we have adopted Liturgical Catechesis as a *parish-wide* model we needed to realign the formation committee structure to vision and facilitate that process. We have a new Parish Formation Committee that is responsible for developing the vision and process for the parish. They are

made up of representatives from the Adult Enrichment Committee, Initial Faith Formation Committee, Education Committee, Youth Commission, adult sacramental formation ministries, and parish representatives. Note, this is a *process*. The process will take time to work through the implications and ramifications of this shift in focus. Dedicated parish leaders are involved in this process and we can trust that the Holy Spirit will work through them and the process to give us a new and effective structure for *parish-wide* faith formation.

The curriculum changes. The church universal has a curriculum. It is a three year spiraling curriculum known as the liturgical cycle or calendar. Beginning each year in the season of Advent we start a new cycle or year of Sunday readings. These begin with

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the gospel of Matthew in year “A” and are followed by Mark and Luke in years “B” and “C” respectively. John’s gospel is included as various times and holy days throughout the cycles. These Sunday cycles include seasons and feasts from the Immaculate Conception in December, to the feast of Christ the King the following November. The readings for these cycles are found in a book called the *Lectionary*. In liturgical catechesis, the lectionary forms the backbone for a faith formation curriculum.

This year, in *Elementary Faith Formation* (grades K-5), we have added 10 minutes to the session times so that we can pray the Word of God with the children each week. We will also arrange the weekly lessons to match the liturgical seasons and readings with the lesson material whenever possible.

*People, make all
the difference . . .*

In *Middle School Faith Formation* we are moving to a full lectionary based curriculum that explores the natural teaching points found in the Sunday readings. We are also moving to a small group model of formation. The small groups, based in homes, will give the young people a chance to begin to hear their own voice as they start the process of discovering a personal faith that is relevant to their life experience.

St. Patrick School, having long ago supplemented its religion curriculum with lectionary based materials, is a valuable collaborator as we move to parish-wide catechesis. They are a rich resource and are already engaged in the planning for our first parish-wide catechetical event this fall.

Additionally, in *High School Faith Formation* we have included a lectionary based curriculum as an added resource for the sophomores and juniors in their continuing Confirmation process and as the starting point of a new Confirmation curriculum for this year’s freshman class.

Family Faith Formation continues to be lectionary based as it enters its second year at St. Patrick. Family Faith Formation brings the family together to listen to the word of God and discuss its meaning for the life of the family as they seek to fulfill their role as the domestic church.

Adult Enrichment is also expanding its offerings this year, striving to engage adults of all ages in the life-long process of discipleship. Engaging adults more effectively in Sunday mass is part of adult enrichment. The process we have adopted for parish committees is called “Breaking Open the Word.” Committee meetings begin with hearing the readings and the

prayerful reflection on where those readings intersect with the lives of those present and with the life of the parish. We wish to encourage all families as well as other small groups in the parish to adopt this model of prayerful reflection, when appropriate, to help all of us to be more engaged with our Sunday liturgy (see the other bulletin insert).

The faces changed. The obvious new face in formation is our Youth Minister, Anjanette Conway. Beginning this fall we are also happy to welcome Jeanne Darnold as the new Coordinator for Elementary Faith Formation and Craig and Becky Swanson as the new Coordinators of High School and Confirmation Formation. They will join Tim O’Brien, the Coordinator of Middle School Faith Formation, as an initial formation team whose ministry is directed toward the 100+ catechists of the parish. They support the catechists whose ministry it is to be the *echoes of our faith*.

What’s Next?

St. Patrick is a growing parish. There is much work to be done and really we have only scratched the surface. New and exciting models for sharing faith and using technology to connect our diverse parish community are available now. What is missing is the people power to explore the options, evaluate the models, and make it happen.

In the end, whether it is reading a bible story to first graders or helping us develop blogs, vlogs, wikis, or podcasts, they are each imagined, created, produced, or performed by human beings. People, make all the difference in our ability to reach one another.

The reality of our society is that people are pulled in a number of different and sometimes opposite directions at once. Finding a balance that will permit us to grow spiritually and creatively is difficult. As disciples the process of maintaining that balance is called stewardship.

The number one challenge going forward is calling the people of St. Patrick to take the time discover the spirituality of stewardship that allows each of us to discern, develop, and share our spiritual gifts to help realize the kingdom of God both here and not yet.

Peace,

Larry Huiras
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