



Reimagining Faith Formation at St. Pius X Parish!

April 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In 2014, the Diocese of Bridgeport held a Diocesan Synod, a one-year process of reflection, discernment, and preparation for the future. Among many important initiatives to come from the Synod were two that impact St. Pius X in particular. The first was a Diocesan Catechetical Task Force, charged with examining faith formation (especially for children and youth) around the Diocese. The second was a diocesan-wide process of parochial strategic planning.

At St. Pius X, our strategic planning process included a parish survey and a dedicated team of parishioners who, based on data from the survey and other demographic information, set a series of goals for the parish. Those goals were published for the parish and are available on the parish website (www.st-pius.org/strategic-planning/). One of the priorities identified in the strategic planning process was Catechesis and Education. Our parish goal for faith formation is focused on increasing involvement in faith formation at all age-levels, making resources more available to parishioners, and expanding our parish-wide understanding of the Catholic faith.

In the Fall of 2017, the Diocesan Catechetical Task Force issued its report (www.formationreimagined.org/document/). While there are many reasons to be hopeful in the Diocese, it is also clear that there is tremendous room for improvement in our catechetical endeavors. Adult faith formation has, in many cases, been lacking in the Diocese. A comprehensive view of faith formation as a life-long task and need has frequently been absent. Therefore, the Diocesan Catechetical Task Force has recommended that the Diocese reimagine faith formation.

With the Diocesan recommendation and our own parish goals in mind, we, the clergy and staff of St. Pius X Parish, have been critically evaluating our religious education programs. While we have made some changes in the last three years, we see a need for further modification in order to best respond to the real circumstances of our parishioners.

Catechesis in parishes across the United States has followed the same basic model for several decades. Meanwhile, our culture and the demands placed on Catholic families have changed in significant ways. Statistics show that within two years of receiving the sacrament of Confirmation, only about 20% of young people are still attending Mass. Our own analysis of our parish population suggests that only about 20% of the children attending religious education attend Mass with any regularity. There are many factors that cause this, including schedule conflicts, cultural pressure pushing religious practice to the margins, and a general sense of being disconnected from the parish community. This new vision for faith formation at St. Pius X is an attempt to meet Catholic families in their concrete circumstances, accompany them as they seek to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, and creatively respond to the needs of our culture. It has been a long-time coming, and the need to shift our methodology is critical.

After prayerful discernment and a thorough review of the findings of the Catechetical Task Force with the parish staff and with the parish strategic planning team, we are pleased to announce that we will embrace the Diocesan invitation to completely reimagine faith formation at St. Pius X. **Please take a moment to read the description of this new vision for our parish on the following pages.** If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

NEW Faith Formation at St. Pius X Parish

What is “faith formation?”

Faith formation is the life-long process of growing in the practice of the Catholic faith, in body, mind, and spirit. There is no age-limit in faith formation. It ought to be holistic on both an individual and communal level. This means that each individual is afforded the opportunity to grow in their Catholic faith as it relates to the whole of their person; to grow intellectually, spiritually, and as a person created in the image and likeness of God. Likewise, any endeavor in community faith formation can be holistic only if the whole community is considered and invited to participate.

Is Faith Formation replacing something?

Broadly speaking, faith formation has typically been a classroom-based endeavor, commonly called religious education or CCD (for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) and has focused on preparation for the sacraments of Confession, Communion, and Confirmation. As such, religious education has been an effort to educate children, typically ending around 8th or 9th grade. An unfortunate mentality of viewing Confirmation as “graduation” has followed this, leading many families to almost completely stop involvement in the life of the church after their children have been confirmed. Additionally, this model tends to leave parents out of the picture, rather than recognizing the essential role parents play in the formation of their children’s faith.

Three years ago, we began an innovative program called **Family Faith Formation**, which meets once a month. Parents and children participate and are provided with catechetical resources to use at home. This inter-generational element in our approach to faith formation is the model we seek to apply to all faith formation at St. Pius X Parish.

Our renewed approach to Lifelong Faith Formation broadens our outlook to include couples preparing for marriage (Pre-Cana), parents preparing to have their children baptized (Pre-Baptismal prep), families with very young children, elementary school children, middle school students, teenagers, young adults, single people, married couples, seniors, and those who wish to become Catholic (RCIA). Faith formation is an endeavor for every member and potential member of our community.

What will the re-imagined faith formation look like?

First, we extend an invitation to every member of the parish to participate in faith formation. Whether you are young or old, married or single, a parent with young children or a grandparent, you are invited to participate in some way in faith formation at St. Pius X Parish. Opportunities for everyone in our community to gather for faith formation will be offered every month, very similar to our current Family Faith Formation program, only with a broader audience in mind. Additionally, we will make resources available so that parishioners can engage their faith on an intellectual and spiritual level even if they are not physically at St. Pius X.

Second, sacramental preparation for Confession, Communion, and Confirmation will be offered. The norm will be for children to prepare for First Confession and First Communion in second grade. Children in fifth grade will prepare for Confirmation and will receive the sacrament in the fall of the sixth grade. As they begin the very challenging middle and high school years, we believe that the grace of the sacrament of Confirmation will give them an indispensable spiritual foundation. Placing the sacrament of Confirmation at the beginning of middle school also reminds us that Confirmation is not graduation. Sacramental preparation will take place weekly during the school year. Parents of children who are preparing for a sacrament will attend five (mandatory) parent sessions offered during the year. It is vital for parents to be united with their children in preparing for sacraments. Only those students preparing to receive sacraments will have weekly classes. All other grade levels are encouraged to utilize the Pflaum Gospel weeklies, attend the monthly Lifelong Faith Formation gatherings, or participate in Edge or LifeTeen youth ministry.

Third, as children get older, it is important that they have an opportunity to engage their faith on their terms and with their peers. We will continue to offer our Edge Middle School Youth Ministry to students in middle school who wish to participate. Edge invites students to engage their faith in a very personal way, while also forming friendships with other middle schoolers who are serious about their faith. Edge leads naturally into our Life Teen High School Youth Ministry, which seeks to continue to build young people up in faith. Life Teen leads teenagers

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and their families into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Edge and Life Teen enable young people to understand how the Church responds to the current circumstances of the world and how they can best live out the Catholic faith in their present-day context. We are proud to be one of the 1800+ parishes in 31 countries offering Edge and Life Teen Youth Ministry!

Fourth, all parish ministries will have a faith formation component. Our parish is blessed with ministries that impact people of all ages and backgrounds. It is important that every ministry be seen as an aid to life-long discipleship.

Why make such drastic changes?

Families today face different demands than families ten or twenty years ago. Schedules are increasingly complex, which has led some families to feel a great deal of stress surrounding faith formation for their children. Faith formation should be a spiritual aid, never a source of stress. Furthermore, as our faith formation program attracts more and more people, it is increasingly difficult to provide a sufficient number of adult volunteers to serve our program's needs. Finally, the most important factor in the religious formation of children is the practice of the Catholic faith within the family. Unfortunately, many people have focused on class attendance or years in a religious education program as the most important factor, at the expense of practicing the Catholic faith by attending Mass every Sunday. With a new approach to faith formation, we hope to encourage a deeper practice of the Catholic faith, placing regular Mass attendance at the center of our lives. These factors convince us that the way we have approached religious education is no longer an adequate way to share the Good News of the Gospel with our parish family and our wider community. Our response, therefore, is to embrace a vision of faith formation that allows the practice of the faith to be placed at the center.

What happens to all our catechists?

We still need you! Though our focus is shifting, your experience teaching the faith is vital. There is always a need for adults to volunteer in the important work of handing the faith on to the next generation. Whether you participate in our sacramental preparation program, in our monthly gatherings for lifelong faith formation, or as a Core Team member for Edge or Life Teen, you are needed!

What about students who have not yet received the sacrament of Confirmation?

In June, our 8th graders will receive the sacrament of Confirmation. Our 7th graders who are currently in the process of preparation for the sacrament will complete their preparation and receive Confirmation in the fall (date TBD by the Bishop's Office). Students currently in 6th grade are invited to prepare for Confirmation this summer. Current 5th graders will receive Confirmation next Spring (at the end of 6th grade). A comprehensive schedule will be shared in the coming weeks.

I'm interested in the monthly gatherings for my family. I have kids who should be receiving sacraments this year. What do I do?

The monthly gatherings will be offered in three-month "blocks." Parishioners are invited to sign up for the entire year, or block-by-block. Children who are of age to receive sacraments should be enrolled in our weekly sacramental preparation program. We also encourage you to make use of the Pflaum Gospel weeklies, which supplement sacramental preparation and are a great tool for families to use as they grow in faith together at home.

This isn't a "sacrament year" for my kids, but we're interested in faith formation. What do we do?

You (and your family) are invited to participate in our monthly Lifelong Faith Formation gatherings. It is a wonderful way to engage your faith more and to participate in the life of the parish community. During the gatherings, you will work with other families and members of the parish as you engage the Catholic faith. We also encourage you to make use of the Pflaum Gospel weeklies, which supplement sacramental preparation and are a great tool for families to use as they grow in faith together at home. If you have children in middle school or high school, they might be interested in our Edge and Life Teen Youth Ministry. We encourage you to take advantage of the other resources being offered, as well.

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I'm interested in Lifelong Faith Formation, but I do not have school aged children living at home with me. What do I do?

You are most welcome to participate in our monthly gatherings and to use the other available resources. Please register! You will be a vital contributor to discussions and activities and will both share your lived experience of the Catholic faith with others and benefit from the example and faith witness of the people you meet during our monthly gatherings!

I'm not interested in Lifelong Faith Formation OR My family schedule won't allow participation in monthly Lifelong Faith Formation gatherings at this time. What do I do?

Please know you are always welcome to start attending the monthly gatherings, or using the other available resources. If one of the "blocks" is not convenient for your schedule, perhaps the next one will be. If this year doesn't work for you, maybe next year! Please do take advantage of the Pflaum Gospel Weeklies which will be available to you and your family, as well as electronic resources we offer. If you have a child in second or fifth grade who has not received First Communion or Confirmation, your child should participate in the Sacramental Preparation program. These weekly sessions will run during the school year. Parents attend five parent sessions. The Sacraments are God's gift to us – as a Church and parish community, we want you and your children to receive the grace of the sacraments!

What do the parent sessions for parents who have kids receiving sacraments look like?

Each of the five parent sessions will involve a study of the foundations of the Catholic faith, with a special focus on how the sacramental life of the Church sustains a healthy spiritual life. The parent sessions will equip parents to accompany their children in sacramental preparation by enhancing parental understanding of the sacraments and suggesting ways to pray and discuss the faith with children. Time will be set aside in each session for prayer, community building, and reading Scripture.

I just want my kids to get their sacraments.

We're happy to help! Please sign up for the sacramental preparation program. Your child will attend weekly preparation sessions. There are five mandatory parent sessions for you, as well. We also encourage you to make use of the Pflaum Gospel weeklies, which supplement sacramental preparation and are a great tool for families to use as they grow in faith together at home.

My children attend Catholic school. Can we participate?

Yes! Local Catholic schools usually include some preparation for First Communion in the second-grade religion curriculum. Many second-graders receive First Communion with their classmates. Preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation, especially at the 5th grade level, is not part of the curriculum. We will work with you to ensure that sacramental preparation takes place for your children, and we welcome your participation in this journey of lifelong faith formation!

I/my children never received the sacrament of Confirmation and are in high school/college/adults. What can I/they do?

You are invited to receive this great sacrament! We will work with you to help you prepare for the sacrament. Simply contact the parish office and with you, we will work out a plan so that you can share in the graces poured out in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

How do I register?

We are in the final stages of setting up our registration process to include online registration. As soon as it is up and running, you will receive an email inviting you to sign-up for Lifelong Faith Formation, and announcements will be published in our parish bulletin and made at all Masses. Once you have selected the Faith Formation opportunities in which you wish to participate, please fill out the corresponding registration form. Limited physical space and the need to prepare adequate hard-copy resources means that registration is very important.