

Pastor's Pen:

Creating a Strong Stewardship Parish: Formation

In parishes with a school, the single largest receptor of parish resources is dedicated to formation. This formation is usually intellectual formation in the form of schools, CCD programs, and sacramental preparation programs. In parishes without schools, usually much less is given to this task. The result is that we can see formation as solely an educational endeavor. In speaking of stewardship, the third pillar of formation includes educational formation but is not exclusive to educational formation. Formation is a broader concept in the Church. Formation includes spiritual, personal, vocational, and educational.

When we speak of formation, we must ask ourselves what is being formed and what is it being formed into. Within the parish, the people being formed are all who present themselves for formation and the end goal is people who are formed into disciples of Jesus Christ.

Formation Begins at Home

The vast majority of a person's formation happens in the home. Even if your child goes to a Catholic school, the vast amount of spiritual formation happens within the context of the home. Attitudes about faith, God, Church, and service are formed within the home by the parents. Parishes assist the parents in the formation of their children. It is a partnership. It is in the home that lessons about the importance and practice of prayer are first learned.

A parish who understands this seeks to help parents be the kind of parents God calls them to be. As is prayed in the Blessing of the Father in the baptismal ritual, "He and his wife will be the first teachers of their child in the ways of the faith, may they also be the best of teachers..." In fact, such instruction is scattered throughout the baptismal ritual.

Few would say that our educational systems have been adequate in the Catholic Church over the last several decades. I believe a lot parents don't know what they don't know. For parish wide formation to be long lasting, we must invest in helping our parents get the skills they need to be the 'best of teachers' that we ask they be in the baptismal ritual. Because formation does begin at home, our partnership with parents needs to begin long before they have placed their children in any of our education programs.

Formation in a Reasoned Faith

Roman Catholicism is a reasoned religion. We believe what we believe for a purpose. It is an integrated faith which applies to all aspects of life. It is more than a set of rules. It is not a set of hoops to jump through. It is not a buffet of possible choices one cobbles together.

This means that any and all catechetical tools we use must reflect the totality of our beliefs. As a pastor, I have personally picked out what we use for all catechetical classes from CCD and school through adult education. I picked these programs based on their correct content, their ability to integrate teaching into daily living, and their ability to be understood. I cannot give you the ingredients for ramen noodles and expect Beef Wellington. I am aim for truth and quality.

This is why we started offering Formed.org to our parishioners. It is a cornucopia of strong catechesis, top notched presenters, and quality production. I cannot emphasize enough how this website is a perfect way for each parishioner using this web-based site to educate themselves on the faith. I am delighted that St. Joseph is engaged in a top-notch Bible study in using the Bible Timeline. I would like to see this at SS. Peter and Paul as well. Kapaun's Men being used in our High School and Men's groups, at SS. Peter and Paul, is instrumental in shaping them to be men of God. It is wonderful to see our young women engaged in a book-of-the-month club where they can enjoy fellowship and strengthen their faith with one another. My passion to immerse you in education about our faith is why I am bringing back Tapping into Theology and re-offering classes on Vatican II. Working together we can all become stronger Catholics!

Not Just the Classroom

We have many educational tools at our disposal and our parishes will strive to provide more. While we are a reasoned faith, belief must be acted upon. It must be expressed in our ability to pray as individuals, families, and as a parish. It must be expressed in our willingness to invite others to faith and throw open our doors and hearts to those who are hurt, searching, or lost. It must be expressed in the service we render in our homes and parishes. Our reasoned faith has practical applications in our day to day lives.

To this end, of the most powerful parts of formation we can extend is in helping our parents. I want to establish this guidance in the form of a continuum. Teaching our dads how to be effective and powerful spiritual heads of the home is important. Teaching our moms how to catechize their children long before they enter a classroom is important. We hope to extend this all the way into marriage preparation. What we are hoping to do is find a pool of young couples we can train who will assist in the marriage preparation for couples and then follow through on baptismal preparation when that new couple has their first child. This is high on my list of goals for both parishes. The most effective evangelist is a peer.

I am asking our Christian Education Committees and Parish Councils to come up with recommendations for the coming year. We will be offering multiple opportunities during the year. I ask each parishioner to find a place to plug into to expand their formation as a Catholic; especially if that parishioner has the vocation of being a parent in forming their children.