



Office of Faith Formation Diocese of Fall River

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction - Letter from Bishop da Cunha, SDV	2
Evangelization & Discipleship	4
Evaluation & Planning Steps	7
Stories from the Field	13
Infant Baptism	15
Family & Children's Ministry	16
Ministry to Young People	21
Adults and RCIA	26
Additional Resources	29



## Diocese of Fall River Office of the Bishop Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.

April 2021

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This past year has not been easy. We have all suffered because of the pandemic, scandals, secularism, and divisions in our country and church. Yet, while the world changes, the truth of the Gospel, along with our imperative to proclaim it, remains the same.

I invite everyone to consider: how can we see the challenges we face as opportunities? How can we, like St Joseph in the Gospels, respond to new challenges with creative courage?

Nothing is more important than our work to evangelize and form engaged disciples for Christ. We must take this time to pray, discern, and evaluate our faith formation, youth ministry, sacramental preparation, and adult formation programs so that they are best suited to respond to present and future challenges, proclaiming the Gospel truth with creative courage.

It is my hope that this planning guide and the trainings offered by our Office of Faith Formation will assist you in this process. I encourage you to make use of these opportunities.

May the Lord bless you and may St Joseph, patron of the Church and protector of families, intercede for you in your work.

Thank you for all you do to build God's kingdom here in our Diocese.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D. Bishop of Fall River

# 66

I dream of a **'missionary option'**, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation...

In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach.

- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.27-28

TTTTTTTTT

## EVANGELIZATION & DISCIPLESHIP



The work of the Church to proclaim the Gospel does not stop. This is both the reassurance and the challenge we experience as Catholics, and which we have seen in new ways amidst the pandemic. St Paul explains it best, stating that:

"Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings." (Heb 13:8-9)

Also, sharing:

"To the Jews I became like a Jew, so that I might win over the Jews...to those who are outside the Law [Gentiles], I became as one outside the Law...so that I might win over those outside the Law." (1 Cor 9:20-21)

In short: the revealed truth of Christ, entrusted to the Church, does not change, nor is it for us to change. However, the means by which effective and efficacious evangelization occurs can. As new challenges arise, we are called to meet them, guided by the Holy Spirit and rooted in the reassuring truth and hope of Christ. The Gospel message of hope is what the world needs now more than ever. Faced with persecution and martyrdom, St Paul proclaimed the Gospel with courage. We must do the same.

We can move forward in evangelization by drawing from our Catholic heritage and courageously apply it to current realities.

## Our goal must be the evangelization and formation of intentional disciples.

This is to say: the calling, forming, and sending out of those who not only believe in Christ but are "ready to put his or her life on the line...in bearing witness to Jesus Christ." (*Evangelii Guadium*, n.24)

To this end, the new Directory for Catechesis (2020) shares that evangelization (*kerygma*) is intimately connected to catechesis (*didache*). Catechesis is meant to be evangelical. (n.2, 57-60) To put it plainly, we can not presuppose that those who enter our catechetical programs have already accepted the Gospel message and experienced conversion.

Rather, we must see our faith formations and youth ministries, sacramental preparations and adult formations as part of a relational and evangelical pathway that seeks to foster engaged, equipped and intentional disciples for Christ. Otherwise, we risk a continual decline which was present *before* the pandemic.

Within our own Diocese, and prior to the shutdown, we saw an overall 41% decrease in reported faith formation attendance over the past 9 years. This is coupled with decreases in the reception of Sacraments (47%) and Mass attendance. (Data from The Official Catholic Directory)

The Barna Group, in "Reviving Evangelism" (2019), shared that nearly half (47%) of millennial practicing Christians say it is wrong to evangelize. Yet, those who

had at least one conversation about faith came away more confident (86%) and eager to talk with others (71%). (10-11) In terms of young people, the Springtide Research Institute's study "Belonging" (2020) shared that young people are in need of trusted adults to overcome loneliness and anxiety (46-47). Moreover, while 7 in 10 students struggle with doubts in faith, at most only 2 in 10 students are likely to have helpful conversations about them, with 1 in 7 seniors feeling prepared for what college brings. (Powell, Sticky Faith, 143-144, 165) We must move toward a strategy of youth ministry to sees evangelization (calling) and catechesis (forming) as tied together, mentoring and equipping them for discipleship.

While this may seem daunting, the Lord calls us to evangelize Southeast MA. We must, as Bishop da Cunha reminds us, see challenges as opportunities and move forward with creative courage. While the pandemic has given us many challenges, it has also provided opportunities:

- To reevaluate programs, models, and methods of catechesis;
- To reach out and check in with parishioners we might not have otherwise reached out to;
- To invite individuals to rediscover the necessity of the Mass and the Real Presence of the Eucharist;
- To better utilize technology as a tool for evangelization;
- To invite parents to be the first teachers in the faith and build domestic churches.

To this end, the Directory invites us to see as an opportunity the challenge of parents' "active participation in catechesis, to **overcome the mentality of delegation** that is so common, according to which the faith is set aside for specialists in religious education." (n.124). This is to say that we must continue to move away from a "pick up and drop off" mentality of catechesis and move toward equipping and aiding parents (and grandparents) in forming families of faith. After all, fathers (56%), mothers (58%) and grandparents (67%) are listed by individuals as the most common spiritual coaches that set examples for them in their lives. (Barna, "Households of Faith", 99)

Considering this, the Directory shares the following stages of evangelization:

#### 1 Missionary activity - "Till the Soil" \*

Do we see our work as missionary activity, going out and inspiring through witness?

#### 2 First proclamation of the Gospel -"Sow the Seed":

Do we welcome and invite those who are unengaged or are non-believers, stimulating them toward faith and conversion?

#### $\boldsymbol{3}$ Initiation into Christian faith and life -

**"Germination"**: Do we facilitate encounters with Christ through catechesis, sacrament, witness, and community?

#### 4 Ongoing formation - "Tend the Vine"

Do we accompany and offer opportunities for people to continually be nourished in a relationship with Christ and His Church?

#### 5 Send on Mission - "Harvest the Fruit"

Do we provide a clear path for people to move to mission, entering into missionary activity but now as the missionaries?

\*(For more information on "The Process" of evangelization, visit evangelizationatl.com)

I am inspired by examples of parishes who continue to find innovative ways to evangelize and catechize. Your work has allowed the Church's mission to continue. We can create momentum through renewed evangelization, setting expectations and steps for discipleship, and forming new ways and models of formation.

Do not be afraid.

David Carvalho

Senior Director for Youth, Young Adult, & Family Life

## WE'RE HERE TO HELP

#### As you go through this guide, know that we stand ready to serve you.

Book a meeting today to start a discussion on your needs and how we can help meet them. Below are just *some* of the ways we can help.

#### Trainings

Whether for your leadership teams, councils, catechists, volunteers, or parishioners in general, we offer tailor made talks and trainings from evangelization, to building youth ministries, to skills development.

## **Coaching & Planning**

Whether it's learning how to pivot, making a change, forming a team, making job descriptions, or on-going accompaniment in ministry, we offer one-on-one coaching and consulting.

#### Talks, Missions, and Retreats

Whether it's a talk to parishioners or families, a day retreat, parish mission, evening of Adoration and worship, or another evangelization event, we can help make it happen.

#### Media & Resource Creation

If you're looking for graphic design, navigating social media and tech, locating the right resource, or creating a resource specific for your parish, we can create materials for you or help you plan.











**Set time aside to pray, discern and plan.** Carve out a little time weekly during the year to evaluate your plans and implementation. Below are questions and prompts to provide food for thought or be utilized as a planning process.

As you work through it, consider how you can gather data and input to inform planning, have a mission and vision, intentionally invite people into the process, set actionable goals, and communicate and educate on the result.



#### Take stock of your families

- Identify those families who did not return this year and those who did. Were their factors beyond COVID that kept people from joining or, if they did, being engaged?
- How can you invite those who did participate this year to be advocates, "missionaries", or leaders in your ministry?

#### Gather feedback from families and participants

- Utilize a survey to gather anonymous feedback, both qualitative and quantitative. Easy survey tools include Google Forms and Survey Monkey. There is much we can learn from both positive and negative criticism.
- Hold a town hall meeting or parent focus groups in a manner that works for them (in-person, virtual, Facebook live while using the comments feature).
- Approach families one-on-one to check in, meet and debrief the year.
- Consider: what was learned from the new approaches used during the pandemic?

#### Engage in a needs assessment

- What are the needs of your families, parish, and wider community?
- Create a profile for what a family in your town looks like. What are their fears, hopes, priorities, limitations, and needs? Where can the Church help meet these needs, calm fears, encourage hopes, and help families assess priorities?
- What are the assets you have (people, spaces, tools, materials, finances, skillsets, tech, a heart for Christ, etc.)? What do you still need to effectively evangelize?
- Are there needs in your community that the parish can respond to and help meet as a way to connect your ministry to mission beyond your parish walls?
- What are the current State and local COVID restrictions and guidelines?



## Setting a mission and vision helps direct efforts toward reaching a goal, not just having activities for activities' sake.

• Your mission shares the nature of your work. Your vision describes where you want to go. For instance, for the Office of Faith Formation:

#### Mission

To aid the Diocese of Fall River's parishes and personnel to evangelize and form engaged disciples for Christ To transform the culture by being a leader in effective evangelization, transformative catechesis, and relational outreach that leads people to Christ and His Church.

Vision

Your Parish may already have a mission and vision you can use, or tailor to your specific office/ministry with approval. For instance, at Church of the Nativity in Timonium, MD, their youth ministry uses the same mission as their Parish:

"Love God. Love Others. Make Disciples."

However, given the focus of their work, they crafted their own vision statement that flows from the mission:

"Our youth ministry is making church matter by growing nextgeneration disciples who will grow other disciples, so that we can influence churches elsewhere to do the same."

- Wesley, *Rebuilding Youth Ministry* (11) When crafting specific missions and visions for formation and ministry, they should:

- Be geared toward evangelizing and forming engaged disciples for Christ
- Be faithful to Christ and the Church's teachings
- If unique to your office, echoes the mission and vision of the Parish

Without a clear mission and vision, those involved in your planning process or programs won't have direction, expectations, or boundaries. But with them, it will help make your work more focused and help you move from theory to practice. Additionally, they help set the goals and metrics by which success is measured.

#### Be in lock-step as a leadership team

• Especially if you look to adapt, mend, or change something, ensure that it is in line with your Pastor's vision and supports the overall mission of the Church. Being united is essential, especially when there is push-back from individuals.

3 INTENTIONALLY INVITE

#### Look to who should be there

• Who are your "stakeholders": those directly invested in and affected by what you do? How can you include them in an evaluation and planning process?

For instance, if you want to focus on your family programs, include key families who will not only complete the program but also advocate for it.

• Who are leaders in your parish community that have a specific skillset, lead a ministry that you can partner with, or are part of an ethnic community? How can you include them in an evaluation and planning process? Need resources translated? We can help!

#### Asking for help

- *First, define what your ask needs to be.* This will help make your ask clear. For instance, write out all the roles you do. Then, identify which ones you need to be doing, which ones are better suited for others, and which ones can be delegated.
- It is worthwhile to create job descriptions, even for volunteers, especially if they are part of your core team. This way, it is clear what they are being asked to do, even for how long, and there are expectations they can be held to. When people know what they're agreeing to, they are more likely to say yes.
- When forming a core team that you need to be consistent, **ask members of your leadership team to each give you 5 names of people that you can approach**. Even ask them to help you make the initial connection. Look at past lists of registered and attending families who may be at least semi-engaged, but haven't yet been asked.
- When making the ask, make a personal connection with the person, share your mission and vision, speak to their skillsets, and make it clear what you are asking.
- When looking for additional or support volunteers, make sure your ask is clear, personal and, at least initially, small. For instance, someone who is personally asked to help in a specifically needed role, for a specific program, for one time is more likely to say yes (and even return) than a general call out to the parish for volunteers.

One strategy is to have a communications or personal letter invitation campaign (signed by the Pastor helps) to the first 20, 50, or 100 families that register. Invite the parent to help with x on x date. Then, follow up with an email or phone call. Especially if they have registered for programs early on, there's a good chance that they find this worthwhile and so be willing to help.

## SET ACTIONABLE GOALS

Once you've set your mission and vision and invited at least your planning team (in terms of order, you could invite the team to help you set the mission), work on actual planning. Like a teacher, start with the end in mind and work backwards, setting your mission, establishing the steps to get there, researching models and resources to help accomplish that (examples further on in this guide) and setting actionable items.

For instance, here is a gene	eral template:		
"In order to	(mission) and help families	s (vision):	
Our goal is by the end of can take the next step to	the year, they will have done	so that they	
Given the assessed needs and feedback we received (see step 1), and our set goal(s), we believe — model(s) and — materials are the best choices and investments to help us reach our goals.			
We will launch number	by da of families participate.	ate, with the goal of having	
To accomplish this, we w educate families on this k		will communicate with and	
Along the way we will set and evaluate this endeav	t the following checkpoints on or as we go."	to check in	

When you are specific and set attainable goals, you can start developing metrics, see and measure success!

And even if there are bumps and mistakes along the way, that gives you valuable information for what does and does not work going forward. For instance, what was learned this past year with new hybrid, virtual, or at-home models? Don't let the fear of failure, or the fear of loosing people, stop you from going where you know you need to go to evangelize and form engaged disciples for Christ!

Ultimately, any planning or change requires time for ideas to sink in and be accepted, kinks to be worked out, and for fruit to be seen. Remember, before the harvest, there's several steps including tilling, planting, germinating, and tending the vine.

While we are seeing improvements, please make sure to stay in compliance with State and local COVID restrictions and guidelines in your planning. See **mass.gov** for more.

## COMMUNICATE AND EDUCATE

#### Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

- Yes, parents are inundated with communications. But if they don't receive any, than things will fall through the cracks. Find what works best for your families and ensure to regularly, and consistently, communicate:
  - Before a program, registration, or change occurs
  - While it is occurring
  - After it is occurring
- Be consistent. Perhaps pick the same weekday or time to send communications, that way families can expect it. This provides stability apart from individual needed emails.
- Invest in platforms that meet your needs. Examples include:
  - Flocknote
  - Constant Contact or Mailchimp
  - Flodesk
  - GroupMe or Remind
  - Up-to-date website (create one for free with Wix)
  - Social media presence

#### Give time to educate, especially if you're making a change

- New things can often scare people. But once they understand and can wrap their minds around it, fear can turn into curiosity, which can be invited to mission. Having different ways to inform and educate families on the what, why, and how is imperative. Your planning team, especially if it includes parents, can help be advocates in this process.
- Some examples include:
  - Having a town hall, host speakers (we can help), or have a homily series on topics pertaining to your mission, vision, and goals
  - Show a united front among parish leadership
  - Share relevant data and findings from your parish, the diocese, and the country on the issues and trends you are addressing
  - Have print and electronic materials that break down what you are doing into digestible steps or concepts, such as through infographics, video explanations/ witness, and articles that can be given out, emailed, or shared on social media
  - Explain how your program benefits or meets the needs of those you serve (this is where making a "family profile" in step 1 can be helpful)
  - Discuss long-term goals and how this process or change will help you all get there
  - Be consistent in your messaging; this helps mitigate future problems



## 66

Our world, our Church, our Diocese, our parishes, they all need to be rebuilt after the pandemic. Who is going to do it? I hope we can all say: **"Here I am**. I am ready to do it. With God's grace and creative courage, **count on me**."

> ...I hope that all these things that have happened in the last year have given an opportunity to look at ourselves and many things **differently**.

- Bishop da Cunha, Chrism Mass Homily, 2021



# **66** At one point in our parish, we knew we had to reevaluate our programs

I contacted as many parents as I could think of that I had some previous engagement with and invited them to go out to coffee. I paid for more cups of coffee than I can remember!

I found myself with valuable time in relational ministry to parents one-on-one: hearing their needs, learning about their lives, and inviting them to be a part of the process.

Was it time consuming? Yes. Did I get no's? You betcha!

But, the relationships built there were invaluable and led to other opportunities. Honestly, I don't think we can plan without

some sort of feedback from families and an invitation for them to join the process. Don't say no for someone. Let them have the opportunity to say no to you. They might just say yes! Even if conflict or tension arise in the process, positive conflict is healthy and needed. Even negative conflict makes us mindful of underlying issues. Someone is more likely to accept a decision they didn't want if they were included in the process.

For instance, one mom I met with gave the idea to host a group of other moms - moms I wasn't in contact with. I ended up gathering at her home with 6 other moms for 2 hours! At the end, one said that she had left our Church, but the message she heard that day made her reconsider and that we should keep sharing what we were doing. God bless her! Sometimes, our work is to clear misconceptions and heal wounds.

When we re-planned our Confirmation prep, we invited parents whose children were eligible to prepare for Confirmation to be a part of a planning team. We formed them in what Confirmation is, what the Church teaches, and discussed models for preparation. They were invested because what we were planning affected them and their children, and so it became an opportunity to evangelize. All these interactions served as an opportunity to invite parents to help in our mission.

Between personal invitation and a communications campaign with our Pastor, we were able to double our middle school team with parent involvement. When we had penance services during Lent, two of the parent volunteers each approached me and said "It's been 25 years since I've been to Confession. How do I go?". Seeing kids go to Confession inspired them to return to the Sacrament. That's an evangelizing catechesis! While not everyone may be comfortable going out right now, we can still reach out to, connect with, and invite parents to be a part of the process." *- David Carvalho* 

## STORIES FROM THE FIELD

"Prior to the pandemic and all of the necessary changes that followed, we were already in the process of exploring new and more effective ways of evangelizing our families. We began with the belief of the Catholic Church that the parents are the primary educators of their children. With that in mind, we recognized the important role that the church plays in assisting these families, but strove to help the parents realize their role in the domestic church. When considering what would be the best approach to evangelize our families, we used the Holy Family as the model for all of us to emulate...We chose a program called "Project Nazareth" (from the Archdiocese of Boston) designed for grades 1-7. Through a series of webinars, videos and in-person meetings, we communicated to the parents, encouraging them and offering support in their role as primary catechists."

#### - Lori Lavigne

Evangelization and Formation Team Our Lady of Mt Carmel, Seekonk

"We are not just trying to impart information about God or the Church to our students, but to lead them to truly become disciples of Jesus who seek him daily. In our programs we talk about and practice different daily prayer habits like lectio divina, the rosary and chaplet of divine mercy, and praise and worship. Many of our students are just dipping their toes into a real life of faith and most are not sure what they believe about God, Jesus, religion, and how that all affects them. We want to give them a space and community to dive into their faith. Students are invited and encouraged to ask challenging questions about the faith...I want our students to ask the hard questions of us as teachers and catechists, otherwise they will go looking elsewhere and maybe get the wrong answer or be put off by someone who shares it uncharitably. The church has the fullness of truth, and I want our students to see that the fullness of truth is Christ himself whom they can come to know in a very real way."

#### - Nate Schaff

Director of Youth Ministry Good Shepard, Martha's Vineyard

"Over the last several years we have been making changes to faith formation for the youth of our Parish. Starting the fall of this past year, we completely moved away from the standard "classroom" format to create GATHER: a Family led - Parish supported formation for families and their children in Grades K-5. Families are encouraged to attend mass if they feel safe but to livestream if they feel safer. During the 10:00 am livestream Mass every Sunday, immediately following the Mass, Fr. David and Deacon Frank stay and chat with the families and children watching from home or sitting in the pews. They answer questions regarding the Gospel and anything else families may want to know about. We are using Life Teen's Edge for our Middle School youth and YDisciple for our High School youth. We are dedicating more time to our Edge kids and then move them on into Life Teen, adapting and adjusting toward 2023."

#### - Beni Costa-Reedy

Director of Faith Formation St Mary's, South Dartmouth

## INFANT BAPTISM

The Directory for Catechesis calls us to give special attention to parents who are asking to have their children baptized (n.232). It asks us to consider how we can:

- "Welcome, listen to, and understand the reasons for the parents' request"
- Based on this, "provide an appropriate pathway for them to reawaken the grace of the gift of faith that they have received"
- Involve the godparents in this journey

In the case of infant Baptism, it is important to dedicate time to helping parents understand what it means to be a domestic church, and how to form their own. Equip parents at Baptism to pass on the faith, and your 1st Communion (and Confirmation) prep will thank you!



In keeping with the concept of an evangelizing catechesis, use Baptism preparation as an opportunity to reengage parents and godparents in their own faith. Invite them to join a small group or intentional community as part of the process; or even make that the process.

When planning, consider the needs of parents requesting baptism. They may:

- Be first-time parents trying to navigate life with a newborn
- Have other children, navigating life with a fuller home
- Be afraid to bring their children to church, or of being judged if their kids are noisy at church
- Be a single-parent trying to get children to and from church
- Returning after having been away from the Church, or seeking Baptism to appease a relative

In your Baptism preparation consider: how can we answer these needs while evangelizing and catechizing? How could your Baptism preparation:

- Connect parents to other first-time parents in an intentional community?
- Utilize mentor families to welcome baptismal families, help with practical parenting questions, and stay in contact with them between Baptism and 1st Communion?
- Ask parishioners to thank new families for being at Mass, even if they're in "their seat"?
- Make it easier for a family that is hesitant to attend church with infants? Explore easy access seating, family Masses or special parking for pregnant moms or families with newborns.
- Send congratulations, baby shower or "baby essentials" gifts from the parish to families?
- Celebrate baptism anniversaries and, when it can be done safely, host baptism brunches to honor families and remind them they are still part of the community.

#### Resources for forming infant faith at home



domesticchurchproject.com





formationreimagined.org/alphabits

dynamiccatholic.com

## FAMILY & CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Catechesis with families is permeated by the kerygma ...The community, in its efforts to bring evangelization and catechesis into families, marks out paths of faith that should help them to have a clear awareness of their own identity and mission...In this way the family is made aware of its role and becomes, in the community and along with it, an active participant in the work of evangelization...Every local Church, through designated offices and organisms, is urged to evaluate the situation in which children live and to study the initiatory and catechetical approaches and itineraries best suited to making them aware that they are children of God."



- Directory for Catechesis (2020), n.232, 243

As a result of the pandemic, there has been a resurgence in the Church's teaching of building domestic churches - aiding families in providing the first proclamation of the Gospel in their homes and be the primary teachers of the faith. Within our Diocese, we see parishes utilize several different models for faith formation:

#### Classroom Model:

Where students learn the faith together with their peers by grade, led by a catechist(s). This may also include asynchronous learning done digitally and categorized by grade-level.

#### • Family Formation Model:

Where parents are provided the tools to teach the faith to their children. This may involve:

- Gathering with other families in the parish, with separate lessons offered specific to parents and children
- Gathering solely as a family at home for formation, with check-ins from the parish
- Gathering with other families in the parish periodically, while remaining together as a family during these sessions, and then gathering as a family in the home for ongoing formation between sessions

#### Intergenerational Model:

Where the various generations in the parish are invited to come together for formation, regardless of if they have young children. Programs may begin with a meal.

#### • Catechesis of the Good Shepard Model:

Where a Montessori style catechetical program is offered. Children are invited to spend time in hands-on learning across three levels: 3-6 yrs old; 6-9 yrs old; and 9-12 yrs old.

#### • Lectionary Model:

Where the Sunday Mass is the central focus of faith formation in a very literal way. Families and children must attend Mass, with follow-up either directly after Mass or asynchronously based on the Sunday readings, homily, and liturgical season.

## FAMILY & CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

The *Directory for Catechesis* speaks to two of these models, calling us to be attentive to:

"Intergenerational catechesis envisions the journey of faith as a formative experience not aimed at a particular age group but shared among different generations within a family or a community, on the pathway marked out by the liturgical year. This initiative makes the most of the exchange of the experience of faith among the generations, taking inspiration from the first Christian centuries.

*Catechesis in groups of spouses and in groups of families* is carried out by the married couples themselves. These journeys of catechesis are intended to develop a conjugal and family spirituality capable of restoring strength and vitality to married life, rediscovering the spousal dimension of the covenant between God and humanity and the role of the family in building the kingdom of God." (n.232)

Parishes are invited to consider: which model (or even combination of models) will:

- Aid their parish in engaging parents?
- Aid parents in assuming their rightful role as the primary educators of the faith?
- Connect families to the Church and help "overcome the mentality of delegation?"
- Make intergenerational connections, including inviting young people and/or grandparents to set examples for children and share witness?
- Aid families to reengage the Mass? For without active participation in the Mass which is our source and summit families and children are "taught on an empty stomach."

#### Preparation for First Eucharist & Reconciliation

The Directory for Catechesis also calls us to be attentive to "the catechesis of parents whose children are making the journey of Christian initiation. The community fosters the involvement of parents in their children's journey of initiation, which for some of them is a moment to deepen their faith and for others is an authentic space for its first proclamation." (p.141)

Parishes are invited to assess their preparation programs for First Eucharist & Reconciliation, asking themselves if their preparation:



- Fosters the involvement of parents as primary educators?
- Both offers the first proclamation and deepens their faith?
- Calls families to, and offers opportunities for, regular participation at Mass and Reconciliation?
- Communicates the reality of sin, God's abundant mercy, and how to make a good confession?
- Now, more than ever, rekindles the central belief in the Real Presence and fosters a Eucharistic spirituality and devotion in families?

To this end, offering ample opportunities for families to participate in Mass and Eucharistic Adoration is paramount. Additionally, helping families to prayer and have faith-discussions with meals at home have are also important.

#### **Resources for Family & Children's Ministry**









#### domesticchurchproject.com

Offers a 6-12 week program that focuses on training parents to be the primary educators of the faith at home. Their app is available for individual and group use, with a Parish platform available for Fall 2021.

#### A Family of Faith

#### sophiainstituteforteachers.org

Made by Sophia Institute, this is a family formation program spanning 4 years of materials, available in English and Spanish, as well as digital versions. Programs include parent, at-home, and communal aspects.



#### evangelizeboston.com/pages/projectnazareth **Project Nazareth** Made by the Archdiocese of Boston, this is a weekly family resource

for families with children ages 5-12 yrs old, helping parents to lead family formation across different Catholic topics and Sunday readings.

#### MagnifiKid

#### us.magnificat.net/magnifikid

Made by Magnificat, it is a resource for children that includes Mass readings and prayers, daily prayers, activities, and parent suggestions.



MagnifiKid

#### Wanderlight

wanderlightgame.com Made by Loyola Press, it is an immersive digital game whereby children of various ages learn and deepen the practice of the Catholic faith. There are two models for Parishes and Catholic schools respectively.



#### Pathways - Faith at Home

#### fflcm.org

thesignsofgrace.org

Made by Faith and Family Life Catholic Ministries, a Public Association of the Faithful in the Diocese of Orange, it is an integrated and family centered formation suite designed to facilitate personal encounter with the Trinity and sustain lifelong development of faith within the family.

#### **Resources for Preparation for First Eucharist & Reconciliation**



#### Signs of Grace

Made by the Augustine Institute, it is a comprehensive sacramental preparation program for Reconciliation & Eucharist that includes a family faith formation component. It is available in English and Spanish.



#### Blessed

dynamiccatholic.com/blessed.html

Made by Dynamic Catholic, it is free sacramental preparation program for Reconciliation & Eucharist that includes animation film series for children, leader guide, and materials that can be sent to parents.



66

If the first stage of all true interior healing is to accept our personal history and embrace even the things in life that we did not choose, we must now add another important element: **creative courage**. This emerges especially in the way we deal with difficulties. In the face of difficulty, we can either give up and walk away, or somehow engage with it. At times, difficulties bring out resources we did not even think we had...

God always finds a way to save us, provided we show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth, who was able to **turn a problem into a possibility** by trusting always in divine providence.

- Pope Francis, Patris Corde, n.5



Earlier this year, the National Dialogue on Pastoral Ministry with Youth and Young Adults issued it's Final Report (2021). This was a multi-year effort, bringing together voices and collecting data from youth and young adults across the country, and including representation from the USCCB, LaRed, NFCYM, CCMA, and the National Advisory Team for Young Adult Ministry.

You can access the Final Report and learn more about the National Dialogue at: www.nationaldialogue.info

In their Final Report, the National Dialogue issued several recommendations for ministry with young people, including:

- More intentionally connecting the life of faith with the lived experience of young people
- More synodal listening to one another
- Addressing the "authenticity gap"
- Increasing the investment in accompaniment
- Expanding ministry with young adults
- Reimagining faith formation
- Reconsidering preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation
- Partnering with parents and enhancing family ministry
- Transforming ministry leadership
- Embracing complexity rather than a "one size fits all" approach (p.22)

The Final Report, along with Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, invites us to reimagine our outreach to young people as not simply faith formation and youth group programs, but rather as a comprehensive approach: a youth ministry that offers young people a clear path toward intentional discipleship, true encounter with Christ, and accompaniment that equips them for mission.



## MINISTRY TO YOUNG PEOPLE

"With respect to ecclesial experience, in this phase of life many fall away from Church or display indifference or distrust toward it. To be considered among the causes are the lack of witness, of credibility, of spiritual and moral support on the part of the family, or inadequate catechesis and a Christian community that is hardly meaningful...Every project of formation which combines liturgical, spiritual, doctrinal, and moral formation, is to 'have two main goals'. One is the development of the *kerygma*...The other is growth in fraternal love, community life and service. Catechesis is therefore to present the proclamation of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, the true source of youthfulness for the world, as a core meaning around which to build the vocational response."

- Directory for Catechesis (2020), n.251, 253

While many have seen ministry to young people as a challenge, it is an immense opportunity that must be met with creative courage. To this end, it is important to note that the first step to a strong ministry to young people is a strong ministry to children and families. If Confirmation is meant to be full initiation and a more formal sending out on mission, the previous years must focus on aiding families and children in tilling, planting, germinating, and nourishing the faith.

This also means that ministry to young people (pre-adolescents, adolescents, and young adults) should respect developmental differences, while allowing one stage to build upon the other so as to create a true discipleship pathway that offers consistent mentoring in the faith, allows young people to "be seen", find the true answers to their questions, and be challenged to conversion. In creating a comprehensive pathway, several components to consider are:

#### • Do we focus on the Mass?

If the goal of evangelizig young people is the development of the *kerygma* and intentional encounters with Christ, there are no more essential encounters than the Sacraments, especially the Mass.

#### • Do we support Parents in communicating the Faith?

Good youth ministry requires good parent ministry. This means equipping parents, inviting them to join you in ministry and mission, accompanying them in raising adolescents, and providing a support system of trusted and faithful adults for their children to be mentored by.

#### • Do we provide large group experiences?

While our planning may still be affected by COVID, in general, experiences of the larger Church help foster energy and momentum. These include talks, worship experiences, adoration, "hook" or social events, conferences, retreats, and mission trips. Many of these can still be done in a hybrid way or with adapted group sizes that meet COVID safety.

#### • Do we create small group spaces?

The pandemic has caused us to think small and that's a good thing. While some love large group experiences, others can become easily lost in them. Moreover, it is difficult for a leader to reach and truly build a relationship with every teen, unless their program is naturally small. Creating intentional small groups with the same mentors and participants, giving enough time for relationships to organically form, allows authentic witness and credibility to develop.

#### • Do we engage in outreach opportunities?

The Church is called to mission, not fulfilling service hours. This is to say that while it is imperative that young people engage in service, like all things, it must be geared toward fostering encounter not checking off boxes.

How can we reimagine service as mission work, service learning projects, passion projects, or by developing a relationship with a service site that young people can then continue to serve with later on? In this we help young people learn and apply the Church's moral and social teachings, upholding the dignity of the human person.

#### • Do we invite young people to lead up?

When we mentor young people to lead in the Church we don't just equip the next generation of leaders, but form today's leaders. Just as we invite families to join us in planning, inviting young people to planning and leadership roles is essential. We can foster leadership by inviting young people to serve as examples, share witness, and mentor those that are younger.

Additionally we should consider:

- Are we helping to equip young people be able to respond to doubts, questions, and pushback regarding the faith?
- Are we exposing young people to the brilliant minds and tools within our Catholic heritage?
- Are we helping young people connect and create community, especially amidst the lack of authentic connection during the pandemic?

#### Preparation for Confirmation

While Confirmation completes full initiation, it must be incorporated into a pathway for discipleship so that it is neither seen as an "end" to the journey nor a "carrot" used to maintain enrollment. Informally, preparation for Confirmation begins well before 8th or 9th grade. Young people and parents should be challenged to first discern and understand what it is they are asking of the Church in Confirmation, and to



not approach the Sacrament as a forced endeavor so as to "meet a social milestone." Jesus invited individuals to "come and see", helped them experience and know the truth so that their hearts were "burning within them", and then sent them out. How can we invite those preparing for Confirmation to do the same?

Parishes are invited to assess their Confirmation preparation programs, asking themselves if their preparation:

- Is incorporated with a vision of a comprehensive youth ministry?
- Involves parents and sponsors in the process?
- Both offers the first proclamation and deepens their faith?
- Connects young people to trusted adults and mentors in the Church community?
- Not only asks but teaches young people how to actually go out on mission?
- Speaks to young people's questions and doubts, providing authenticity and truth?
- Provides encounters with Christ?

## MINISTRY TO YOUNG PEOPLE

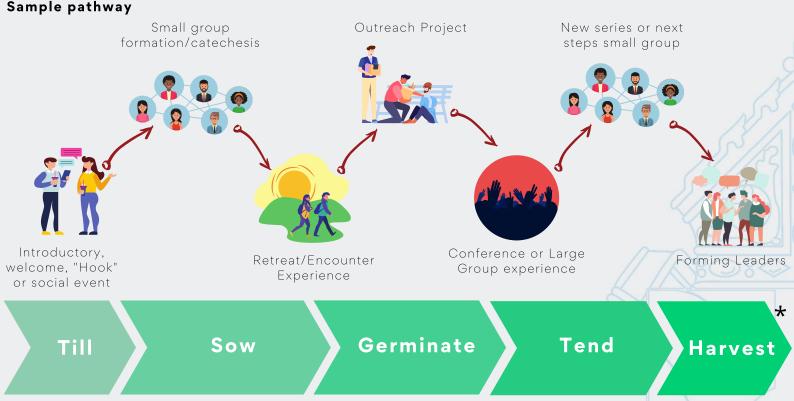
#### How can we order steps to create a pathway?

You don't have to have individuals do everything at once. Below are examples of a pathway that invites individuals to take steps intentionally. Just as we have used the language of phases in leaving a shutdown, how can we think of an invitation to discipleship as occurring over phases?

What experiences or formation should a young person have first before taking the next step?

Where would a certain component fit best to stimulate growth or intentionally challenge them so that they are ready for the next step?

Remember, begin with the mission and the end in mind and then work backwards.



\*Terminology taken from Archdiocese of Atlanta's Evangelization Process (see evangelizationatl.org)

This is just an example, and you'll have to tailor it to your situation, such as size of group, available spaces and means, the necessity for hybrid or virtual, or the amount of help that you have. You can always grow and tweak it. We're happy to help you make one for your Church!

For Confirmation, what steps unique to that preparation may be needed or could be fruitful like:

- A Mass of welcome or acceptance of candidates and their families
- Parish mission nights for candidates, parents and sponsors
- Check-ins with a mentor, director, or parish leadership
- Discernment of readiness involving the sponsor
- Celebration of Reconciliation
- Transition to discipleship small groups, next steps, or parish apprenticeship post-Confirmation

#### **Resources for Youth Ministry**



#### lifeteen.com/cym

purposeconfirmation.com

Offers middle school, high school, discipleship group, lectionary-based small group, retreat, and core team training materials all through their online subscription. Parishes can purchase just part or all of their subscriptions, gaining access to all past and future material releases.



**EDGE** 

#### **YDisciple**

ydisciple.tv YDisciple is an affiliate of NET Ministries and provides small group digital series and materials, including on prayer and encountering God, as well as small group training resources. While present on formed.org, additional series can be accessed by their own affordable subscription.



#### **Ascension Press Teen Formation**

ascensionpress.com Ascension Press offers several curriculums, with digital options, featuring known Catholic youth speakers. Materials include nonsacramental Chosen, Altaration: the Mass, Quick Catholic Lessons, and YOU: Theology of the Body for teens.



#### **Credible Catholic**

crediblecatholic.com Featuring the work of Fr Spitzer on Catholicism and science, Credible Catholic offers materials, online student courses, and trainings tackling questions of reason, science, and faith. Also available in Spanish.

#### **Resources for Confirmation Preparation**



#### Purpose

Made by LifeTeen, it is an Confirmation preparation program that utilizes their model of gather, proclaim, break and send, while also incorporating their lectionary based small groups at the beginning of sessions, breaking open the Sunday readings for teens.



#### Chosen

ascensionpress.com Made by Ascension Press, their Confirmation preparation version of Chosen features known Catholic speakers. It is available in a digital version, as well as in English and Spanish.



#### **Decision Point**

dynamiccatholic.com Made by Dynamic Catholic, it is a free Confirmation preparation program with video series for teens, leader guide, and materials that can be sent to parents.

## "There is no doubt that the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today, who are buoyed up by hope but at the same time often oppressed by fear and distress, is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity."

POPE PAUL VI, EVANGELII NUNTIANDI, N.28

"Catechesis with adults is therefore configured as a personal and community learning process, aimed at the acquisition of a mentality of faith...Its main objective is therefore the formation and maturation of life in the Spirit...The general task of catechesis with adults needs to be configured in reference to the different types of persons and religious experiences in question. In fact, particular *tasks* that follow, which could also correspond to chronological arrangement, demonstrate in truth the continual attempt on the part of the ecclesial community to relate to adults, seeking to grasp their concrete existential situation and setting itself to listen to their real demands and needs. Particular tasks of catechesis with adults are therefore: *to elicit faith...to purify faith...to nourish faith...to assist the sharing and witness of faith.*."

- Directory for Catechesis (2020), n.260-261



Ministering to an adult population brings with it various age differences and thus requires varied responses. The areas of young adults, young parents, middle-aged adults, grandparents and elderly all bring very specific needs, challenges and possibilities.

Yet, while being differentiated in approach given the audience, adult evangelization still has as it's goal the calling and formation of intentional disciples. Consider the following:

#### • Use intentional, small communities to get specific

While small groups by themselves are not the sole answer, they offer a great option for a varied adult demographic. Adults can be invited to form or join small groups by age, gender, or state in life (i.e. parents or widows). While they can all work through a similar series or study, this will help foster relationships and speak to needs relevant to individual needs.

#### • Do we offer opportunities to "tend the vine"?

While an adult may be fully initiated they need continual nourishment. While certain ministries hold value, depending on what their purpose is, they are not always geared toward ongoing formation or spiritual renewal. Do we offer retreats, days of recollection, or times of Adoration and Confession? How can we better collaborate with nearby parishes to build momentum?

#### • Do we speak to adults' needs?

Do we offer support to young adults seeking community, relationships, or vocational discernment; to parents trying to learn how to parent; to adults in need of job or finance training; to parents struggling with their children who fell away from the Church; to grandparents trying to stimulate faith in their grandchildren? When we speak to their needs and worries, we create a connection that can then lead to an evangelizing catechesis.

This can take the form of partnering with the **Catholic Grandparents Association**; forming a small group around **Brandon Vogt's** *Return*, which aids parents learn how to invite fallen away children back to the Church; or offering a course, such as from **Compass Catholic Ministries** (compasscatholic.org), that weaves financial planning together with Catholicism.

#### Do we use the RCIA as a process for evangelization?

When we discuss inviting individuals to become Catholics, we are discussing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The Church still sees this catechumenal process (inquiry, catechumenate, enlightenment, mystagogy) as the basis of catechesis. Consider the following:

#### • Team

- Do we have someone who is the RCIA coordinator and an RCIA team of mentors?
- Does the parish know who they are? Would someone looking for RCIA know how to connect with them?

#### Relational Invitation

- Do we have a plan for inviting and reaching out to those for whom the RCIA is meant for? While an inquirer may begin coming to Mass, usually we have to reach beyond the Church building and bulletin to invite. Are we present where those people are?
- Communicate and educate those who are in the pews on their roll in making personal invitations and in creating an evangelizing parish that goes beyond its walls.
- Utilize adult small groups in your parish as a funnel to identify and invite those in need of the RCIA, or to even serve as the pre-catechumenate (inquiry) phase.
- When possible, increase your parish's visibility in the community through direct acts of missional service. Seeing the Church in action may spark the curiosity of a non-Catholic or someone who is not fully initiated so that they consider returning to church.

#### • The Rites

- The Rites of RCIA are essential. While often times parishes celebrate the Rite of Acceptance and/or Welcome in Advent, you can also plan to have it throughout the year so as to invite individuals into the RCIA process year-round.
- Ensure that catechumens celebrate the Rite of Election and Scrutinies, and that candidates for full communion celebrate the Call to Continuing Conversion. These rites are obligatory.



#### • "Evangelizing" Catechumenate

We're reminded that "the length of the catechumenate period will depend on the grace of God and on various circumstances... Nothing, therefore, can be settled a priori [that is, beforehand]. The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough – for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong". (RCIA n.76)

As a result, there can be various ways to approach the catechumenate as the catechumenate should address the needs of the inquirer, while ensuring that they are given sufficient time to celebrate the needed Rites. This could involve a combination of the following:

- Small group formation
- One-on-one mentoring
- Using the parish's life and events
- Retreats and worship that aid inquirers understand Catholic worship & liturgy
- For candidates, the opportunity for Reconciliation
- An invitation for the parish to meet and share witness to inquirers, and vice-versa

#### • Use the Liturgical Year

- Do we incorporate the traditions, practices, or parish missions during Advent and Lent into the catechumenate?
- During Lent and the period of enlightenment, do we help the elect discern where they are in the process and deepen in prayer, tapping into the natural opportunities of Lent?

#### Mystagogy

Not too dissimilar from adolescent Confirmation, parishes may fear that once individuals are fully initiated they may never return. As a result, we have to regain a sense of mystagogy - the period after full initiation.

The National Statues for RCIA set by the US Bishops called for monthly follow-ups with the Initiated. Having something consistent, either as part of the RCIA program or in the parish's life, for them to tap into, remain connected, and continue to be formed is important. Moreover, build this step into the RCIA process and introduce them to the people they may encounter later on in the parish, so as to help facilitate an easier transition post-initiation.

If your parish already has a system of intentional small communities, that can be an easy way to ensure the Initiated find a community within the community.

It is also worth making creative ways to reconnect. For instance:

- Invite the Initiated, their sponsors, and families to a dinner or brunch after the Easter Vigil or at the one-year mark, *or*
- Send a gift or reminder of their initiation anniversary
- Invite them to return as mentors on the RCIA team or to provide witness to new inquirers, candidates, or the parish in general so as to spark additional future invitations

#### Adult Confirmation

While a parish may choose to use the RCIA team and catechumenate to provide Confirmation preparation for adults who already celebrated Baptism and 1st Communion, consider how you can make this preparation more specific to them:

- Do they remember their previous catechetical experience and regularly practice the faith, or have they fallen away and only now returned?
- Would they benefit from one-on-one mentorship?
- Are there several Adult Confirmation candidates that can journey together?
- Are they only looking to be confirmed so they can be a sponsor? How can that be an evangelizing moment to share both the purpose and responsibility of a sponsor, as well as invite them to enter a pathway for discipleship?

Given the necessity of the parish community in a person's faith life, preference for Adult Confirmation preparation always belongs to the parish. If a parish chooses to use the Diocesan Adult Confirmation program, consider sending a parish representative or parishioner to be a team member in the program or to serve as a parish mentor that checksin with them throughout the preparation process. This way, after they are confirmed, they already have a connection at the parish they are meant to return to.

#### **Resources for Adults & RCIA**



WORD ON FIRE

#### Formed

Offers a subscription based digital library of video-series, movies, documentaries, audio books and talks. Some of the other programs listed on this guide can be found on formed.org.

#### Word on Fire Digital

#### wofdigital.org

formed.org

Offers a subscription based digital library of Bishop Barron's video series, talks, films, and study programs.

#### The Search

thesearchbegins.org Made by the Augustine Institute and featuring speaker Chris Stefanick, the Search is a new, innovative, and engaging video series that is kerygmatic in nature and features post-series topical videos. Available on formed.org for parish use. Participant and leader guides available.

#### Symbolon

#### augustineinstitute.org/parishes

Made by the Augustine Institute and narrated by Dr Edward Sri, Symbolon is a video-based discussion program that provides an indepth overview of the Catholic faith. Guides and dvds available for purchase. Video series included in formed.org.

#### The Wild Goose

thewildgooseisloose.com A 4PM Media project featuring Fr David Pivonka, TOR, it offers several video series including The Wild Goose on the Holy Spirit, Metanoia on conversion, and The Wealth of Poverty.



THE WILD GOOVE

#### Discipleship Quads steubenvilleconferences.com/discipleship-quads

Made by the Steubenville Conferences, it offers materials and resources to launch 4-person small groups geared toward intentional community, prayer, formation, and discussion.



SYCAMORE

#### ClaritasU

Offers subscription based access to videos, modules, live Q&As, and books by Brandon Vogt, Content Director at Word on Fire, specializing in helping individuals become confident in understanding what Catholicism teaches and why.

#### Sycamore

Offers an an informal course about the Catholic faith and its relevance for life today, ideally done in a small group setting. It gives individuals space to meet other people, share ideas, explore beliefs, and think about questions that really matter.

#### sycamore.fm

claritasu.com

SEARCH







#### **Revive Parishes**

reviveparishes.com Now offers their online training courses for free, after no cost email sign up. Courses cover a variety of topics and are taught by national experts in leadership, parish life, evangelization, and youth ministry.

#### Nextstep

#### ecnextstep.com/collections

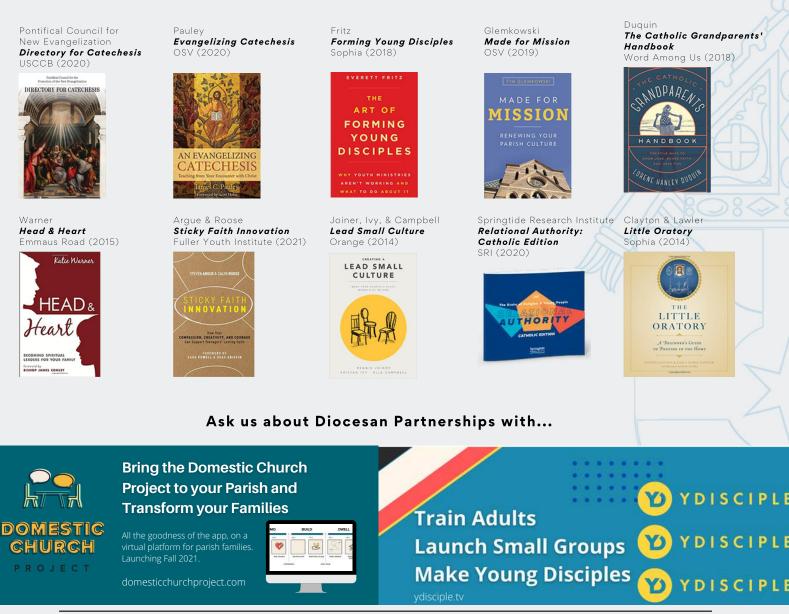
Offers free online modules on crafting and journeying through discipleship and family pathways. It also includes a module on becoming a guide for discipleship.

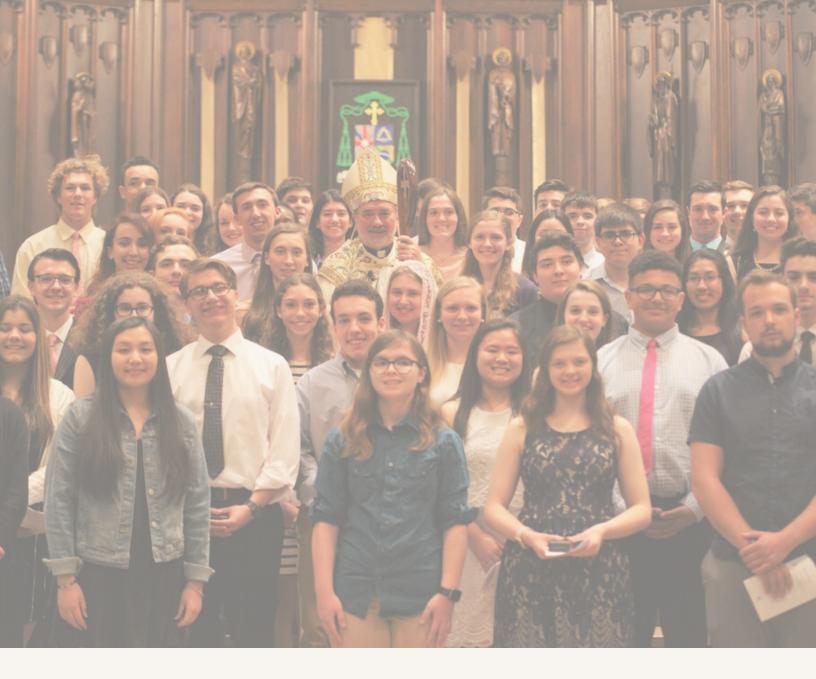
#### **Divine Renovation**

#### divinerenovation.org

nextstep

Offers free webinars on various relevant topics to parish life and evangelization, especially as it pertains to navigating the present times.





## "My grace is enough for you."

- 2 Cor 12:9



www.fallriverfaithformation.com

