

Gatherings

Reflections

Dear DREs and Youth Ministers:

January 7, 2010

From the Religious Education Office

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Small Christian Communities and Other Adult Faith Formation Opportunities

by *Bryan Reising*



In the summer of 1981, I volunteered at a parish in southern Louisiana, Our Lady of Good Harbor Parish in Buras, Louisiana. It was then that I first experienced a small Christian community. The members of this SCC

would pray, listen to the Sunday scriptures, and share the faith and life with one another. It was a great experience as I grew in my faith. Many of these parishioners, who had endured tragedies like Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Hurricane Camille in 1969, had a deep faith. There is no doubt that their faith is even stronger today as they endured Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

In 1989, toward the end of my studies at Loyola University Chicago in Theology, I was learning about a model of evangelization that utilized SCCs very well. It was in this model that the SCC had the following structure: pray, learn, build up, and care. It followed the model of Acts 2:42 and following: "They devoted their lives to the apostles' instruction, the breaking of bread and the prayers, the communal life..." It goes on to share how they cared for all those in need. These four elements reflect four elements of Church of the early Church: *leitourgia* (Eucharist and prayer), *kerygma/didache* (encountering Christ and learning about the faith), *koinonia* (building up the community), and *diakonia* (service to the needs of others).

In the Fall of 2009, the diocese sponsored a Pastoral Leaders' Day for our pastors, priests, and pastoral leaders. The topic was small Christian communities. Christopher Ruff of the Diocese of Lacrosse explained how these SCCs could really nourish our parishioners in the faith.

So if Adult Faith Formation is indeed the priority, can we offer things like small Christian communities and intergenerational catechetical offerings? Some of our parishes do offer these, but I believe more of our parishes need to make this the priority. Why? Catholics who are disciples know why. They are the ones who are keenly aware that faith is about a real relationship with God, a relationship with the community of faith, a learning of the faith, a celebrating of the faith through the sacraments, and a living the faith in our vocation, Church and society. Those adults who do take their faith seriously can face the storms that blow their way.

How can a parish get started with small Christian communities and other Adult Faith Formation opportunities? A good start would be a consultation with the Office of Adult Faith Formation. I can share with you various resources that are available to parishes. Many of these resources can be found on the following link: <http://dnu.org/word/missionfollowup.pdf>. This link is the compiled list of resources for ideas to follow-up the mission back in 2008.

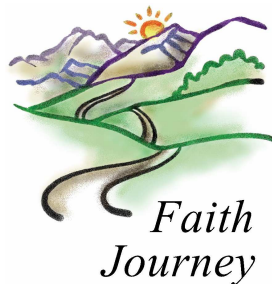
In general, I would make the following recommendations:

- Find a model that includes a renewal experience like a retreat or mission. This will give your parishioners an encounter with the living God. It can be an experience of tremendous conversion or a continuation of their conversion. This experience will lay the foundation to their faith relationship with God and the Church.
- As a follow-up to the renewal, they can belong to a small Christian community where they can pray together, learn the faith together, build one another up, and share their gifts within their vocation, the parish, and society. Remember, SCCs can be from 7-15 people as an optimum number. They can be homogeneous (like to like) or heterogeneous (mixed). Dedicated SCCs can meet weekly. At the very least, they can meet once a month.
- Do research on the content of catechesis you intend to use for your SCCs. I would recommend that do not become exclusively a Bible study or a prayer group. I recommend that



catechetically, give them opportunities to learn about Scripture, Sacraments, Morality, Catholic Social Teaching, Prayer, and Creed. Start simple so that you can grow deeper in the future.

- Offer parish-wide or even Area Faith Community opportunities where you can have a speaker series, an intergenerational evening, or a master catechist giving direction to the evening.
- Encourage online faith formation learning through University of Dayton's VLCFF: <http://vlc.udayton.edu/>.
- Involve your parishioners with the various ministries of the parish, with acts of charity (in the town, city, county, or beyond), and acts of justice (again in the town, city, county, or beyond).
- When involving them in ministries look at your priorities and be creative. Have you considered involving them with the RCIA team, a welcoming committee, a ministry to those Catholics we miss, or perhaps a home visitation ministry? When my family lived in Mexico, Illinois, and West Virginia, I was involved with this home visitation ministry. This ministry enabled me to find inactive Catholics and people who were interested in the Catholic faith. In addition, it was an opportunity to keep in touch and invite regularly active parishioners to various opportunities in the parish, and it was an opportunity to build up ecumenical and interfaith relations.



If we take up this clarion call, we will indeed see more vibrant parishes and more active involvement by our parishioners. I believe the result will be more vocations to the priesthood, religious life, diaconate, and lay ecclesial ministry. I believe the result will also include more volunteers willing to serve and more financial commitment to Christ's mission in our parishes and our diocese. I believe that because of the strong faith of our people, we can weather any storm that may come our way.

Mohr Catechist Scholarship Fund
*A Gift for You, Catechists, Youth Team Members,
Teachers of the Religion*

A new scholarship fund is a great gift for your catechists, teachers, youth ministry team, and many of you! You can receive scholarships for Faith Formation Day and other catechist formation opportunities, NCEA Convention, MCEA Convention, online courses through the University of Dayton's VLCFF (Virtual Learning Community of Faith Formation), and even some college courses on faith formation. An application is on our website: <http://www.dnu.org/word/mohrscholar.pdf>.

VIRTUS Trainings

- February 11, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. Marshall [Church]
- February 20, 2010 at 9:00 a.m. Watkins
- March 20, 2010 at 9:30 a.m. Arlington
- April 12, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. Hutchinson
- May 8, 2010 at 9:30 a.m. New Ulm St. Mary

All Catechists are required to:

1. Have a background check before beginning to volunteer;
2. Sign Forms A & B of the diocesan sexual misconduct policy;
3. Attend VIRTUS training within 90 days of beginning to volunteer;
4. Do the on-line training as assigned.

Volunteers and catechists who are under the age of 16 are not required to attend the adult VIRTUS training. The VIRTUS training is for youth and adults ages 16 or higher. If you have a question about VIRTUS, please contact Margy Manderfeld at **507-233-5305**. Please do not contact VIRTUS directly unless you need a password.

Touching Safety - VIRTUS Website - Educator Tab

If you have not done Lessons Five and Six of the Touching Safety Program, please do so as soon as possible. They were to be turned in by November 30, 2009. If you have questions, please contact Bryan or Margy. Thank you!

University of Dayton's VLCFF Cycle 2: Feb 28 - March 20 (Registration: Opens Jan 13; Closes Feb 24)

[Designing a Parish Catechetical Plan \(Seminar\)](#)

[Marianist Prayer Circle](#)

[On Bended Knee \(Seminar\)](#)

[Our Hearts Were Burning \(Seminar\)](#)

For further information, contact Bryan Reising at 507-233-5324 and check out VLCFF's website:

<http://vlc.udayton.edu/>.

Upcoming Gather for February for Parish Catechetical Leaders (PCLs or DREs) and Youth Ministers

We begin with a social, a prayer, and then enrichment with a guest speaker, lunch, meeting/networking, and closing prayer. If you have conflicts like work or other commitments, let me know. We can perhaps work on a conference call during the evening sometime or even a visit.

Our Gather in February will be **Monday, February 1, from 10:00 am - 3:00 pm** at the Center of Youth Ministry. The Gather will feature Sharon Horgan, former director of Catechesis in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. She will talk about the **Six Tasks of Catechesis**. Please RSVP Cindy at 507-233-5325 or cblickem@dnu.org.

NCEA & NPCD Convention in Minneapolis
April 6-8, 2010
at the Minneapolis Convention Center

Keynote presenters include:

- **Garrison Keillor**
- **John J. Findlater** (an educational consultant) and
- **Sr. Mary Angela Shaughnessy, SCN** (an author and attorney) – she will address the internet and social networking.

Parish Faith Formation offerings include:

- Understanding of the Word in the Catholic Tradition with **Jim Schellman**
- Developing a Culture of Vocations with **William Baer**
- Using Technology for Catechesis with **Larry Huiras**
- Spiritual Life: A Priority for Teachers and Catechists with **Most Rev. Lee Piche**, Auxiliary Bishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis
- Called to Mission: Ritual Catechesis and Confirmation with **Steven Ellair**
- Proclaiming Our Story Through Media and Technology with **Tim Welch** from the Diocese of Saint Cloud

For further information and registration, go to <http://www.ncea.org/events/conventionfees.asp>. Parish catechetical leaders and catechists are welcome to register!

RCIA Seminar: Concerning the Baptized
August 6-7, 2010

Save these dates! August 6-7, 2010 at the Church of St. Catherine in Redwood Falls, MN. Featured speakers are Rev. Michael Clay and Sr. Gael Gensler, OSF. Fr. Michael Clay is from the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, and he is an author and expert on the catechumenate in rural parishes. Sr. Gael Gensler is a practitioner of the RCIA at a parish in Illinois.

MCEA Convention in Duluth
August 23-24, 2010 at Duluth
Entertainment and Convention Center

Keynote Presenter is **ValLimar Jansen** (singer and story teller) and the Capstone Presenter is **Lee Nagel**, executive director of NCCL. Many pertinent workshops will be available for parish catechetical leaders and catechists. All State Catholic youth Choirs will also be featured. For further information and registration, go to <http://www.mncatholiced.org/Speakers.htm>

Adult Faith Formation Resources from
Diocesan Media Library

- **At Home with the Sacraments: Reconciliation**, Twenty-Third Publications

- **Bring Down the Walls: Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of Rerum Novarum**, Lumen Catechetical Consultants, Inc.
- **Permanent Diaconate**, CTNA
- **Echoes of Faith** (Morality, Scriptures, Creed, Liturgy and Sacraments, and Prayer and Spirituality), RCL
- **EPIC: A Journey Through Church History**, Ascension Press, Fisher Productions
- **Faithful Revolution: Reflections on Vatican II**, RCL
- **First Corinthians: The Church and the Christian Community**, Ascension Press
- **Fireproof**, Affirm Films
- **The Gospel is a Social Message: Justice in the Christian Tradition**, Fischer Production
- **In the Footsteps of Jesus: Catholic Social Teaching at Work**, USCCB
- **Initiation or Commitment: The Role of Confirmation**, CTNA
- **The Jeweler's Shop**, Ignatius Press
- **Linking Faith and Work: An Adult Education Agenda**, CTNA
- **Little Rock Scripture Study**, Liturgical Press
- **Martian Child**, New Line Cinema
- **Mother Teresa**, Twentieth Century Fox
- **Over Holy Ground**, Ignatius Press
- **RCIA: Journey of Faith**, Sheed and Ward
- **The Sacrament of Eucharist: Past and Present**, Twenty-Third Publications
- **Sacraments of Healing**, Oblate Media
- **Sacraments of Initiation**, Oblate Media
- **Sacraments of Service**, Oblate Media
- **Seven Deadly Sins, Seven Lively Virtues**, Rev. Robert Barron
- **We Are Called: Catholic Social Teaching for Today**, Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

These and many other resources (DVDs, videos, and audio) can be used by member parishes, schools, and individuals. Check out the Media library catalogue at <http://dnu.kdsi.net/search/search.php>.

National Conference for Catechetical
Leadership (NCCL) Membership

Right now, they are doing a membership drive for potential members of NCCL. **The cost of an individual membership to NCCL is only \$60.00. This is only \$5.00 a month.** For further information, check out the website: <http://www.nccl.org/>

Parish Catechesis Question

Have you ever been involved with a small Christian community? If so, share how it benefited your faith life. What Adult Faith Formation opportunities are offered in your parish?



From the Youth Ministry Office:

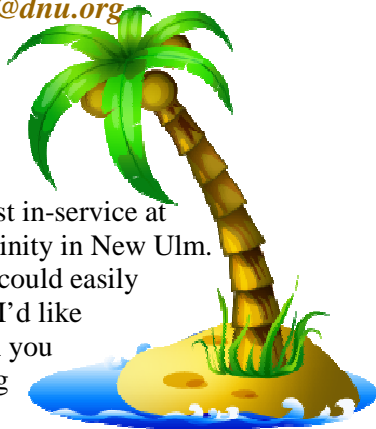
Sr. Margaret McHugh, DSMP

Director of Youth Ministry & Vocation Awareness

mmchugh@dnu.org

An Island Retreat

Last evening, I led a catechist in-service at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New Ulm. All of what we did and said could easily be done in any other place. I'd like to share this experience with you so that you can do something similar if you find it helpful.



Knowing that educator's morale can sometimes use a boost in mid-winter, we made sure it was a lot of fun and provided some good "hands-on" help. We decorated the tables with bright blue plastic table cloths, bits of clean fish net, and assorted shells. With the help of a CD of soft Hawaiian music and the sounds of the waves, we created a relaxing and fun environment. Arriving catechists were surprised to see bright beach towels on their seats and gaudy island paper place settings.

As we began, I explained that the first thing youth ministers and catechists have to do with young people is to get their attention. Those opening arrival moments are invaluable windows of opportunity. If adults do not "seize the moment" when their kids are "sizing things up," they can lose the opportunity to not only catch their attention but lose their credibility.

First lesson:

Get their attention *right away!*

You'll be more likely to keep it.

Second Lesson: Know your task.

Catechists found two Ziploc bags at their place with wet and dry "building materials" and a paper plate with dabs of peanut butter. I told them that our task as catechists is to "Make Faith Stick." We talked about the Ichthus, or fish-shaped line drawing Christians used to self-identify themselves in the first centuries. In a practical "hands-on" project, everyone was invited to find ways to *make faith* (represented by a pretzel goldfish) *stick* to a larger cracker base.



Third Lesson: Know your audience.

Know where your kids are coming from.

Years of experience as a catechist and DRE have taught me that catechists (and DREs/Directors of Faith Formation) are ready for an island vacation by January. And just about any island will do! Just the *thought* of warm sand and sitting in the sun can bring a smile to Minnesota faces. This awareness helped me choose a theme and a way of presenting a lesson that would connect with the catechist's world.

Kids arrive for Faith Formation after a full day of school, music or dance lessons, and/or sports practice. Is it any wonder they balk at another *classroom experience*?! If you can change just one aspect of the environment (i.e. move the desks into a circle, set up a small visual display or include a musical selection) this can send a wordless message to your kids of your understanding and interest in them as persons. St. John Bosco, one of the patron saints for youth, once said, "Youth don't *care how much you know* until they know *how much you care.*"

Cathedral catechists found a plate, napkin, and full glass of Hawaiian punch at their place. However, when we actually got into the lesson, they found that not everyone had the same utensils to work with. Most people had a piece of cutlery at their place, but some had knives, others had spoons, and a few had only forks. I explained that life has not given every kid the same set of tools. Our youth come to the table with different sets of family situations, varying degrees of faith experiences, and great gaps in family involvement. The same feelings engendered in the catechists in discovering they didn't have the proper tools are also experienced by our youth in faith formation. It doesn't mean that God can't work and we can't form them in the faith, but it does entail an understanding that we must approach the task differently and do the best we can with what we have.

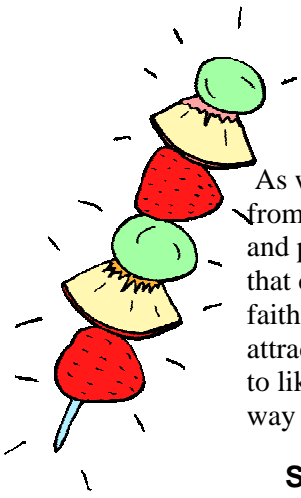
Fourth Lesson:

Prepare, Prepare, Prepare!

Break it down into manageable chunks.

Last night, I asked the catechists if they would hand their own children a whole pineapple and expect them to eat it, without first cutting and preparing it into bite-size portions. A whole un-cut pineapple sat on the display table as a visual aid. We actually had a culinary discussion on the techniques of determining pineapple ripeness and slicing strategies. The point is that we can't just hand *the whole deposit of the faith* to our kids without breaking it down into manageable chunks and bite-sized pieces.





**Fifth Lesson:
Present it in an appealing
and attractive manner.**

As we created tropic fruit skewers from sliced bananas, pineapple chunks and purple grapes, I reminded them that catechists also try to present the faith in a way that is appealing and attractive. If you want your own kids to like fruit, you first present it in a way that's fun and enjoyable.

**Sixth Lesson:
Make Faith Connections.**

Our tropical fruit skewers were not only nice-looking but they reminded us that we learn through making connections. In education, this is often referred to as "anticipatory set." We begin to introduce a topic by making connections with what we already know. Even our neural connections and brain synapses grow and develop by making new connections. Finding new ways to present ancient truths helps us to grow deeply rooted in our faith. Catechists last evening had the opportunity to combine a few required ingredients with optional materials of their own choice. I told them that we have the opportunity as educators to combine pure classroom requirements with our own personal gifts and talents as we share the faith.

**Seventh Lesson:
Get beyond the appetizers.**

As we concluded our in-service, I asked catechists if life is only made up of appetizers and hor'd'ourves? Is our faith only marshmallow fluff and frosting? We talked about using the various activities as opportunities to go deeper in faith...and get into the meat and potatoes!



Religious Education / Youth Ministry Calendar

Mon, Jan 4	Gather for DREs & Youth Ministers	10:00-3:00	Center for Youth Ministry
Mon, Feb 1	Gather for DREs & Youth Ministers	10:00-3:00	Center for Youth Ministry
Mon, Mar 8	Gather for DREs & Youth Ministers	10:00-3:00	Center for Youth Ministry
Apr 6-8	NCEA Convention		Minneapolis
Mon, Apr 12	Gather for DREs & Youth Ministers – Curriculum Day	10:00-3:00	Catholic Pastoral Center, New Ulm
Sun, Apr 25	Jr High Festival	11:00-5:00	Montevideo Public high School
Mon, May 24	DRE/YM Spring Fling	Noon-4:00	TBA
Thurs-Fri Jun 17-18	Young Women's Discipleship Camp	Thu 9:30 am-Fri 5:00 pm	Center for Youth Ministry
Thurs-Fri Jun 24-25	Young Men's Discipleship Camp	Thu 9:30 am-Fri 5:00 pm	Center for Youth Ministry

If what we do as catechists and youth ministers does not lead our youth closer to Jesus and the Church, we are doing them a great dis-service.

As a group, we took the opportunity to dive into the Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church and go deeper into the topic of Baptism. Actually reading the account of Jesus' Baptism and what the Catechism says about the sacrament refreshed our knowledge and helped us to come to a renewed appreciation of the sacrament. We made the liturgical connection between our evening in-service and the upcoming Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.



I reminded them that next week is National Vocational Awareness Week. Our vocation is a deeply rooted in our baptismal call to follow Jesus. This discipleship leads us to mission to share our faith in a specific vocation. I am so grateful that my vocation enabled me to be present at that in-service last night and gave me the opportunity to share my faith and experience with all of them...and you!

Rally Follow-Up

Next month, we'll focus on the 3rd of the Three Most Frequent Questions Catholic Youth Get Asked: How can you believe the bread becomes Jesus at your church services? I will have this posted on the Youth Ministry website as well.

**Junior High Festival
April 25, 2010
11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Montevideo's Public H.S.**