

April 1, 2020

Dear Parents,

May the Lord give you His peace.

This is certainly a time for faith. How blessed we are to know God and be able to turn to Him especially when we are facing adversity and hardship. If anything, what we are going through now really highlights the importance of making sure our young people are receiving the very best when it comes to their faith formation. Long before any pandemic existed, our Director of Religious Education, Jean Jackson and I had been meeting regularly to discuss ideas to better serve the youth of our parish with regard to religious education. We feel that a *Family Centered Catechesis* (FCC) program for children in grades 3rd – 6th and a *Sacramental Program* for grades 1st and 2nd and grades 7th and 8th would serve our parish best. A brief overview of each is provided below. A more detailed overview is attached. We welcome your feedback!

Essentially, a *Family Centered Catechesis* model involves you as the parent teaching your child at home using a lectionary based program with handouts that will guide you through each weekly session. In addition, one Sunday a month, from 9:00 am – 10:15 am your child would attend class while parent(s) attend a workshop at the main church. Part of the workshop experience would include a review of the upcoming lessons for the month. As you can see, this program is quite different from the more traditional classroom based model we have been using for many years. This is a concept adopted by a number of parishes who, perhaps, are responding to needs similar to our own here at St. Anthony's.

The *Sacramental Program* is very similar to what we already have in place here at St. Anthony's with some proposed modifications. Children in the *Sacramental Program* would attend classes twice a month rather than every week. Grades 1st and 2nd will come on Mondays for one hour and grades 7th and 8th on Tuesdays for an hour and a half. Parents will participate in the various scheduled activities and meetings throughout the year as we have done in the past. Please note that if you have a child in the *Sacramental Program* and the *Family Centered Catechesis Program*, parents do not have to attend the monthly workshop on Sundays. Your child, however, would still have to attend the monthly class.

As in the past, we will continue to emphasize the necessity for participating in Mass each Sunday, not only as a requirement for both programs, but in obedience to the 3rd Commandment. We are no longer requiring envelopes to be submitted each Sunday to verify your attendance. Instead, as a sign of your commitment to weekly Mass, we are asking each family to submit a *Mass Plan* as part of the registration process. You can plan as far ahead as you wish or week to week. This is as simple as going to our parish website and filling out a schedule online. It can be modified at any time. More information about this will be forthcoming.

The *Family Centered Catechesis* model provides a number of great benefits. We now have an option to deal with a shortfall of catechists. It has becoming increasingly difficult to offer and

maintain the current options of days and times for classes given this shortage. In fact, more times than not, Jean has had to cover classes while trying to manage her administrative responsibilities at the same time. Anticipating that this trend will continue based on data from the past few years and in light of a projected increase in the number of students in our program (thankfully!), this structural change is needed in order to ensure that we are maximizing our potential when it comes to our religious education program.

A practical benefit of this program is that it will lighten the weekly burden of driving your child back and forth to class *every* week (at multiple days/times if you have a number of children). We recognize the increasing demands placed upon families these days, especially when it comes to scheduling activities and commitments for your children. I am sure you are not the only parent in a moment of exasperation who has shouted in one form or another, “this is *too* much!!” It is overwhelming for the children as well. Depending on what session they are attending, they could be either very tired at the end of a long day of school or all wound up having had little or no downtime to decompress. In addition, if religion class is being squeezed in-between other commitments that day, it presents an additional challenge with regard to staying focused and energized. In general, Sunday morning is probably a more productive time with regard to attention and focus given the late hours and tiredness of the children after a whole day in school.

The spiritual benefit of the *Family Centered Catechesis* program is that it will provide a wonderful counter point to a society that is becoming less and less God centered. As a result, too many families are finding it difficult to sit down together as a family at the dinner table or at the Eucharistic table/altar at Church on Sundays. The program will allow you as parents to exercise your role as the primary educators of your children in the faith in a another way. It will no doubt deepen the experience of being a family of faith as you gather the family for lessons and prayer. The fruits of this are many and varied. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, who knows what conversations and discussions will be sparked! We believe this program will be more effective for helping to provide the enrichment, opportunities, and resources to strengthen our families both at home and in the parish.

Please let us know what you think! We were hoping to offer you the option of signing-up for information sessions over the next month. Given our current restrictions however, for now, please email us your questions and thoughts and we will do our best to respond.

I look forward to seeing all of you hopefully soon. We will keep you posted on any developments with regard to the rest of this year as well as the registration process. Let us continue to keep one another in prayer!

Peace,

Fr. Tom