

Dear Parents,

As Fr. Bob mentioned in his letter in this past week's bulletin, we are moving to a family based catechesis model for our Religious Education Program. Oh! The questions you must have...right? Don't worry! Let's begin with what this program is about:

What is Family Based Catechesis? It is a faith formation program designed for public school, home school, and private school children and their families. Through weekly Home Lessons, Family Formation helps parents pass on the Catholic Faith to their children and together grow in knowledge, faith, and holiness. This model enables parents to be "the primary educators in the Faith."

How does Family Based Catechesis work? On the first Wednesday of each month (September – May), families will come to St. Matthew's and we will begin with dinner which will be provided for you. After dinner, the students will go to their classroom and parents will stay behind. Students will work with a catechist who will present the month's topic and teach the first lesson. A speaker will present the same to parents. Before you leave, you will receive a packet of three weekly lessons. These lessons bring the whole family together to study and then apply the teachings to their day-to-day family life. The entire evening will take about an hour and a half.

What are the Weekly Home Lessons about? These lessons are formatted in a unique and creative way based on rich curriculum designed to make living the Faith a way of life and a life-long learning adventure. The lessons are easy to use and have been developed and used by regular parents with normal, busy lives. Learning is made fun through games, activities, stories, memory verses, quizzes, and audios/music. We will provide you with everything you need to cover the lessons at home. Lessons also reinforce Sunday Mass, reflecting the liturgical year and immerses the families into the life and seasons of the Church.

Our family is very busy; how much time will this take? Lessons for Grades K-6 take approximately one hour per week to complete. Lessons for grades 7 and 8 take approximately two hours a week to complete. Grades 9 and 10 will prepare for Confirmation and they will have about two hour weekly lessons as well as required service hours.

Why Family Based Catechesis, why not just send my children to a weekly class? Studies tell us that parental involvement in the faith-life of their child is by far the most important element in ensuring that a child develops into a practicing Catholic. Family Formation provides parents with easy-to-use materials to catechize the whole family and help parents in their sacred and beautiful mission to lead their children to Heaven. Through Family Based Catechesis, the **entire** family not only receives clear and correct doctrine, but develops and deepens a meaningful relationship with Christ and His Church.

I am a single parent / my spouse is not Catholic. Will this work for me? Absolutely! All parents are given the graces necessary to lead their children to our Heavenly Father. The additional effectiveness of family-based catechesis is a wonderful blessing to families in these more difficult situations. The clear, simple explanations of the Faith as presented in Family Formation lessons are a great way for a non-Catholic parent to learn about Catholicism and to have their questions answered.

I have children in different age groups. How do I include younger and older children in the Home Lessons? Each Home Lesson offers parents a great deal of flexibility and a variety of activities. This allows parents, who are the best judges of their children's skills, needs, and attention spans, to tailor lessons to their own family's needs. We encourage parents to challenge, but not overwhelm their children. With younger children, it is best to approach topics at the most basic level knowing that they will be covered again the next time through the three-year cycle.

What is the most difficult part of this program? The biggest challenge to families is simply finding the time to do Family Formation each week. At our first meeting of the school year, we will have parents and children get together and agree on a time, put it in writing, and commit to setting aside one hour each week. Perhaps setting aside the traditional Wednesday CCD night works because there are typically no other school activities scheduled at that time. Others may

choose Sunday afternoons and use their Family Formation time as part of the way they keep the Sabbath holy. It is entirely up to you.

What about my 2nd grade child who is supposed to receive First Reconciliation and Holy Communion? There is a separate Family Formation program for those preparing for the sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion. Students in our program, will meet at the same classroom time as regular Family Formation students. Instead of just learning about the topic of the month, they will also concentrate on their preparation for one of these sacraments.

I don't know enough about the Faith, how am I supposed to teach my kids? Parents do not have to be experts in the Faith to use Family Formation. Each lesson is written at an elementary school level, and is easily understood by everyone. By simply spending a small amount of time in preparation each week, parents can become familiar with the topic in the upcoming lesson. Additional references from Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are given for those interested in further study of the topic. One of the richest blessings of Family Formation comes as families learn about the beauty and truth of the Catholic Faith together. Many parents have testified to the fact that, through Family Formation, they have come to learn and understand the Catholic Faith better or even for the first time.

My children already attend Catholic Schools. Faith formation at home is critical, regardless of a child's school environment. By using Family Formation, a family can grow together in their faith, and the shared faith experiences offered make for many teachable moments throughout life. Children receive significant lessons in the importance of continuous education in the Faith as they see their parents giving priority to their own progress. At every age, growth in our faith is important!

I don't have children, or my children are grown up and my nest is empty. We need you! We need your love and prayers. All good things begin and are sustained through prayer. It is the prayer of the entire parish that will help safeguard our children's hearts and wellbeing.

I hope I have been able to answer most of your questions. Please know that Fr. Bob's heart's desire is to bring his flock to Heaven and by choosing this form of Catechesis, he is ensuring he will bring his entire flock, not just part of it. I understand if this can be a little daunting or scary, but rest assured of Fr. Bob's and my commitment to you as well as our prayers and love for you and your family

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have further questions.

Your Sister in Christ,

Joy Orozco