

New Religious Education Program in the Fall for Public School Students - Part I

Since arriving at St. Matthew in 2002 I have been seeking for new ways of passing on the faith to the children of our parishioners. The old methods aren't applicable to our youth today and many parents feel lost when trying to answer their children's questions about our Catholic faith. Even public-school educators have expressed a need to change the way they pass on knowledge to children. What worked in 1980 doesn't have the same effect today. The same goes for parish religious education classes for public school students.

They were called CCD classes when I attended them. People still refer to Wednesday night religious education as CCD. (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) is a term developed in Rome in 1562.) The primary book for students was The Baltimore Catechism, in both Catholic Schools and parish CCD classes. After the Second Vatican Council textbooks for CCD classes changed. People played around with different names for the program: faith formation, religious education, faith catechesis, catechetical formation ... but they were really all the same old CCD programs. Even the textbook companies varied little in the basic teachings of the faith, some were better written or had more exercises, or were easier to teach for inexperienced catechists. But what needs to be looked at is the product ... are children assimilating the faith? Are they able to understand why their Catholic faith is important and of value, in other words, something they really desire to understand better? Are parents growing in the faith alongside their children?

One of the Old Testament scripture texts I love to emphasize when it is read at a Sunday Mass, is Deuteronomy 6:4-7. "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up."

When I preach on this text at Mass I try to emphasize the importance of repeating [these words] to your children, "keep repeating," it says. Also,

it's important to note that this is a parental responsibility. It is a promise parents make to God when they baptize their child, and again just before they exchange vows in the holy sacrament of Matrimony ... to raise their children in the faith ... not only by what they say, but also by their actions. The pastor and catechists play a supplemental role, but the main role, the main teachers of the faith, in the lives of children, are the parents.

Reflecting on this we have decided to move to a new form of catechesis, actually it's an old form of catechesis (it's been around for a while) that focuses on family, and family catechesis. This "new" methodology will begin in the fall. So, I want to take the next couple of weeks to explain what it is all about. As we go along, if you have any questions about it, please be sure to email me on our website or contact me on the parish Facebook page. Or, even better, contact Joy Orozco at the parish office, she will be more than happy to share her excitement about this new program.

Fr Bob