

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH FAITH FORMATION?

Why doesn't St. Brendan have a "CCD Program"?

CCD is an acronym for Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, an association established at Rome in 1562 for the purpose of giving religious instruction. The first CCD establishment in the United States was in New York City in 1901. Brooklyn, which had the nation's largest known Catholic population at the time, and an estimated 70,000 Catholic children in public schools, adopted the CCD program in 1921. CCD was established to help the many immigrant families, where illiteracy, a new language to be learned, poverty, proselytizing, and the insecurity of being in a new land led thousands to neglect their faith. Gradually the acronym was adopted for all parish public school children's religious education programs based on a classroom model. Over time, that acronym has been replaced with the terms religious education or instruction, catechism class, and, more recently, faith development or faith formation. Only rarely is **CCD**, now an archaic term, used to describe religious education in parishes across the United States.

Why doesn't St. Brendan have weekly classroom instruction for parish children?

In 2005, St. Brendan adopted a "**whole community**" approach to faith formation because the school model for religious education has proven ineffective. Whole community refers to lifelong catechesis for all age groups and situations (with a focus on adult formation.) At St. Brendan, we focus on adult-centered faith formation while offering support and resources to parents who, at their child's baptism, accepted the responsibility of passing on the faith. In response to an over-emphasis on children's formation with a dearth of offerings for adults, the US bishops, as expressed in their documents, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* and *To Teach As Jesus Did*, encourage parishes to adopt lifelong adult-centered faith formation. As a result, many parishes across the country have moved to the whole community model.

How do the children become educated in their faith? They are taught by parents and grandparents, the ones most influential in their lives and who model their faith in daily living. In his book *Whole Community Catechesis*, author and religious educator Bill Huebsch addresses the problems with the classroom approach to religious education. He writes: "In the late 1960s, Catholics in America passed through a period of serious disagreement with the Roman authorities of the church over birth control. Families were challenged by the rise of cultural icons like television. They no longer prayed together at home as much. They no longer followed a strict observance of feast days, fasting, and church rules. In fact, they no longer even sat down to supper together as often as they used to – in some cases, they stopped doing so altogether.

During this period, parents started dropping their kids off for CCD class while they went grocery shopping. The expectation slowly arose for many that it was up to the parish to provide faith formation. But we all know the truth. A child comes to a parish religious education program an hour a week...No matter how good the program or textbook may be, if that child returns home to a household where no faith is shared, then there's very little the catechist can do for that child's faith. ... the households in which our learners

live are already the most influential factor in their formation. This is true about their religious beliefs as well as other aspects of life: values, dreams, and lifestyle.”

The *Declaration on Christian Education*, a document from Vatican II, states: “Parents are, in fact, the first and foremost educators of their children within a family atmosphere animated with love providing a well-rounded foundation. The family can be called the first school of those social virtues every society needs. The Christian family is ... the place where children are first taught to know and love God and to know and love their neighbor.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule . (from article 2223)

The *General Directory of Catechesis* states: The family passes on human values in the Christian tradition, and it awakens a sense of God in its youngest members. It teaches the first tentative steps of prayer, it forms the moral conscience, and it teaches human love as a reflection of divine love. Indeed, the catechetics of the home are more witness than teaching, more occasional than systematic, and more daily than structured into periods. (article 255, *The GDC in Plain English*)

What if parents themselves don’t have enough knowledge to teach their children at home? Since adopting our new faith formation process in 2005, St. Brendan has provided all families who participate in faith formation with opportunities and resources to assist them in learning more about the faith. The books *Catholicism Today* (a survey of the Catholic faith, including prayers) and *What Makes Us Catholic* were given to each household participating in our formation process. Copies of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are provided upon request. In addition, parents who participate in faith formation are given guides for at-home activities and discussions with their children. Parents are always encouraged to request additional resources to meet their family’s needs.

What about preparing for the sacraments? Parents whose children are preparing for the sacraments are offered additional assistance and resources in a series of sacramental preparation sessions. Intensive preparation sessions for baptism, first penance, first communion, confirmation and marriage are continually offered.

How can one hour of faith formation each month possibly be enough? We can never receive “enough.” Faith formation is a life-long process, from birth to death. Parents and children have a wealth of opportunities to learn about their faith – from celebrating Mass each week, to service in their parish community, to discussions around the kitchen table, to praying and reading Scripture together, to sharing life with their brothers and sisters in Christ within their parish and beyond. How many hours a week would be “enough” encounters with Christ?

While living their Christian faith, parents pass on the faith to their children even if parents are not consciously aware of what they are doing. If parents believe that attending Mass is important, they will attend Mass with their children and impart that value to them. If parents rely on prayer, they will communicate the value of prayer to their children. If parents value Christian service and care about issues of social justice, they will model that in their daily living. The example of Christian living in the home is the greatest teacher.

If the parents are the primary teachers of the faith, why offer break-out sessions for children? And, during those sessions, what is the facilitator's role? Break-out sessions for the children are designed to offer a positive, welcoming experience of church. They are not intended to be religion "classes." In some sessions, facilitators read Bible stories to the children and discuss them. In other sessions, children watch Gospel-based video stories. In other sessions, major liturgical feasts are celebrated. In all sessions, facilitators are encouraged NOT to see themselves as teachers but as adult moderators whose role is to offer the children a positive experience while their parents are attending the adult sessions. The children also benefit from socializing with their peer groups.

What are the parish's expectations regarding faith formation? We believe that all adults, regardless of age or educational background, can benefit from participating in faith formation. By offering a wide variety of programs and resources, we hope each parishioner can participate in a faith formation process that meets his or her needs. Parents who choose to participate in our faith formation process are expected to come once a month to Catholicism from Scratch.

Parents whose children are candidates to celebrate first communion with their parish community must be registered in the parish and participating in our monthly faith formation for at least two years prior to celebrating first Eucharist with the parish group. Parents who have recently moved to the area and are new to the parish and have been participating in faith formation elsewhere should inform the parish staff.

How do we register for faith formation? Registration is very simple. Please call 754-8544, ext. 30, to sign up or e-mail mhhart@atmc.net. Because we are a tithing parish, we do not normally charge for faith formation materials.

What other offerings does St. Brendan have for those who desire to grow in their understanding of the faith? In addition to the offerings already mentioned, St. Brendan has a **Theology and Film** series offered monthly on Thursday afternoon. Participants view a contemporary film and discuss it afterward in the context of the Gospel. Some of the films shown and discussed were "E. T.," "Forrest Gump," "Schindler's List". Upcoming films include "Philadelphia" and "Paradise Road" and many more.

Theology on Tap is offered to adults who'd like to partake in a "spirited" conversation about matters of faith. One Tuesday evening a month, participants will gather in the backroom at Mama Brava's restaurant in Shallotte to discuss such subjects as "Can only

Christians be saved?” “Is the Bible true?” “Is homosexuality a sin?” These discussions are open to anyone age 18 and over.

Small Faith-Sharing Groups meet weekly in various area neighborhoods and at the parish to discuss Sunday readings and share.

Take Ten: Short (10 minute) sessions covering a wide range of topics (anointing of the sick, annulments, Christian burial) will be offered monthly after each Mass.