



ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

May 20, 2021

Dear St. Catherine Parish Family,

Last year, because of COVID protocols, we implemented a new family faith formation model called *Families Forming Disciples*. Families, including parents and children, gathered together with clergy and catechists virtually via Zoom for large group gatherings as well as small group meetings. This program was open to all of our families with children of all ages who were seeking to grow in faith together as a family, and it also served to fulfill the requirements for sacramental preparation for our younger children.

Although this family catechesis program was a new model for us, it proved to be an incredibly fruitful endeavor. At the beginning of the year, a number of parents were understandably very uncertain about this model and preferred instead to have their children attend PSR classes under the traditional classroom model. Because of the complexity of the COVID protocols for gatherings, however, a family program done virtually seemed to be the best option. I cannot tell you how many parents commented to me that, although they were initially skeptical, it turned out to be an amazing and unexpected blessing. For many, it was the first time that they had an organic and convenient way to talk about the faith and pray together as a family and with other small groups of families in the parish.

Because of the overwhelmingly positive experience this past year, I have decided to continue the family catechesis model as our program for our children's faith formation in the parish for this coming year. Last year, this was all done virtually. Thankfully, however, this coming year we will be able to offer in-person gatherings. And for those who wish to continue with the virtual format, we will continue to offer this option as well (in-person on Sunday mornings and virtual on Wednesday evenings).

Our format for the program will be similar to last year's, including large group gatherings led by a member of the clergy, small group gatherings with a catechist and other families, and projects or activities completed by each family separately. Those of you who participated in the program this past year know that I, myself, served as the main catechist for the large group lessons (Fr. Valery led the lessons for the Hispanic community). It was a huge blessing for me to be able to play a more direct role in our catechesis, and I plan to continue teaching the main lessons this coming year as well.

The Church reminds us that parents are the "primary educators" of their children in the faith, and I am even more convinced of the importance of our parents' involvement in the religious formation of their children. Our parishes and schools exist to support parents in fulfilling this duty, not to replace them. And the beauty of the family catechesis model is that it allows parents to play a central role in the religious formation of their children with the support of the whole church: clergy, catechists, and other families.





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I understand that some parents may still have reservations about embracing this model, but I encourage you to be open to trying it. As I mentioned before, a number of parents have commented to me how pleasantly surprised they were by the convenience of the program and, more importantly, by the fruit that they saw in their family. For those who absolutely cannot participate as a family, we are allowing children to participate in the Zoom option on Wednesdays by themselves, and we will place them in a separate small group with other children along with a catechist.

As with this past year, *Families Forming Disciples* will serve as our main children's faith formation program for all ages, but it is specifically directed towards children in grades 1-7. This program will also serve to fulfill the requirements for two-year foundational sacramental preparation for First Reconciliation and First Communion for our younger children who are not enrolled in a Catholic School or a Catholic Homeschool program. *Families Forming Disciples* will not, however, fulfill the requirements for those preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation. Those in the 8th and 9th grade preparing for reception of the sacrament of Confirmation at the end of the 9th grade/beginning of the 10th grade will need to attend a weekly stand-alone *Confirmation Foundational Preparation* program (they may attend *Families Forming Disciples* as well, but this is not required). These Confirmation preparation programs will also have an in-person and a virtual option.

In addition to our *Families Forming Disciples* and our *Confirmation Preparation* programs, we also have several other faith formation opportunities for our children and teens. For our younger children in PreK and Kindergarten, we have *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, which is a Montessori style program done in-person. We will also be offering a monthly relational middle school ministry (*B'Tween Life*) program for children in grades 6-8 as well as a weekly relational high school ministry (*Relentless*) and a weekly Bible study (*Logos*) for our high school teens (registration is not required for *B'Tween Life*, *Relentless*, or *Logos*).

I am extremely excited to be able to offer different faith formation opportunities for our children, teens, and families, and I am confident that they are going to bear incredible fruit once again for our parish. Registration has already begun for our programs for next year. Visit our Children's Faith Formation website at www.stcatherinercc.org/cff for more information and to register. And feel free to contact our Director of Children's Faith Formation, Joan Hennes at joanh@stcatherinercc.org if you have any questions. As always, I am praying for all of you. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if there is anything I can do for you.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Neil Dhabliwala
Pastor

