

# An Introduction to Whole Community Catechesis

This packet of information is for you and your household

If you are a parishioner of St. John Neumann Parish of any age or any stage of life, please review the following pages. The following information is meant to provide a thorough vision of an important process in the parish that will benefit the community and each individual who participates. The following information is *not* just for parents of children in the Religious Formation Program.

## What is it?

**Whole Community Catechesis** is a religious formation model that brings the community, a group of all ages, together to learn, share, and grow. To be clear, we should define that **Catechesis** has many aspects, and among them are the sharing and instruction in the Catholic faith. **Religious Formation** means a development of a person's life in accordance with the gospel and a process that strives to allow one to lead a life conscious and aware of the presence of God. It takes many forms, with the most predominant form at St. John Neumann being Faith UNwrapped (FUN) for all ages, these sessions make up the religious formation process for households of our parish. Rather than a grade-level program for children; there is an assembly process for the whole community.

## Why are we doing this?

**The leaders of the Catholic Church** have been calling for a more holistic approach to religious formation for many years. There are two main sources that call for this type of catechesis: *The General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) and *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*. The GDC is the international guide for catechesis for the entire one-billion-member Roman Catholic Church, which was called for at the Second Vatican Council. *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* is a pastoral plan for commitment to adult faith formation from the U.S. Bishops. Many other Catholic leaders have created a vision for a whole community approach to catechesis and the two approaches St. John Neumann has used for our model is a book called *Whole Community Catechesis* by Bill Huebsch and "Generations of Faith", a process created by the Center for Ministry Development. See the Resources Page for information on all of the aforementioned.

In essence, the church documents remind us that religious formation is ongoing and life-long for all members of the church, but that the primary responsibility of a parish is the religious formation of all *adults*. Parents are the most important teachers of their children, and all adults need the skills, comfort level, and deepened faith in order to share it with their children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, friends and co-workers. Religious formation that is part of a child's upbringing is highly preferable to the outlook of religious formation as "catechism", "CCD", or "religious education", which are classes in which children learn facts about the faith. Religious instruction and knowledge of the Catholic faith is vital, but experiencing it within the home from their most important catechists, their parents, is the ideal. Additionally, it has become Catholic myth that learning about the Faith as a child is sufficient in remaining a faithful Christian. The documents stress that this is a very dangerous idea and that religious formation is an ongoing process with the *only* graduation being entering eternal life. It is exciting to know that many adults are searching for this knowledge and confidence in their faith. Many do not feel "qualified" or comfortable sharing their religious beliefs with their children or peers. This is something we are committed to changing.

## What is the Goal?

**The goal of Whole Community Catechesis is to aid the creation of Households of Faith.** Whoever lives within the household should feel empowered in knowledge of their faith, a comfort level to share that faith, the ability to pray with one another, and feel a connection to the parish they are part of. This involves openness to a deeper personal connection to Christ on the part of the members of the household.

We feel confident that a religious formation model that stresses shared experiences of faith will aid the progression to a Household of Faith. We also feel confident that, if we were to continue to use only a children's classroom model, the development of Households of Faith might be very difficult for most situations.

## What does it look like?

**Whole Community Catechesis at St. John Neumann has a number of different aspects to it, but at the center are the liturgy and our monthly Faith UNwrapped (FUN) for all ages.**

*The central piece of formation anywhere in the world is the liturgy (mass) each Sunday. The whole church joins us in reaffirming the importance of weekly attendance at the liturgy in order to grow and be refreshed in the Word, in the Eucharist, and through the community who shares our deepest beliefs.*

*Outside of the liturgy, the centerpiece of religious formation at St. John Neumann will be monthly Faith UNwrapped (FUN) gatherings. All parishioners are invited to attend the monthly Faith UNwrapped (FUN). By "all people", we mean those who are very faithful members of the parish, those who attend mass only, those who only come to church once in a while or on holidays, and everyone in between. The same Faith UNwrapped (FUN) is offered six times each month in order to allow for all parishioners to attend.*

Faith UNwrapped (FUN) will follow a theme each month, around the time of the church year or a significant part of Christian living. The atmosphere is designed to be relaxed. Different Faith UNwrapped (FUN) sessions will have various ways to teach and experience the lesson. In the past, Faith UNwrapped (FUN) sessions have included live drama, movie clips, talks, games, reading, and sharing. Each Faith UNwrapped (FUN) will always include a meal and prayer. Faith UNwrapped (FUN) will give time for adults and children to break off into separate groups so that they can learn and experience the lesson on their own level. At no point do we desire to put adults or children in situations in which they feel uncomfortable – special efforts are taken to allow for all to feel a sense of ease in participation.

The response from those who have attended past Faith UNwrapped (FUN) has been overwhelmingly positive. To view a summary of participants' comments, please stop in the Religious Formation Office.

*Whole Community Catechesis is not limited to liturgy and Faith UNwrapped (FUN) though. The pastoral staff also offers a parish Question for the Week that can be discussed beginning on the weekend of that liturgy. This discussion is encouraged in each parish household. In addition, a sharing, popularly called "Breaking Open the Word" is encouraged at each parish meeting, to begin with reading the current Sunday gospel passage and discussing it as a group. This applies to all parish meetings including Pastoral Council and the commissions, youth and young adult ministry, and all other parish study or social groups. Both of these prospects offer a shared reflection on scripture by the whole community regarding a certain concept of faith and how to respond within our normal, everyday lives. We see these options as valuable possibilities for growing in faith together.*

## Who is involved?

All parishioners are part of Whole Community Catechesis, from the very young to senior members of the community. All are invited and encouraged to attend liturgy weekly. All are asked to attend the monthly Faith UNwrapped (FUN). All are asked to open their vision to creating a Household of Faith, no matter what their household looks like. It comes as no surprise to church leadership at any level that many family situations are "non-traditional". We want any household, at any stage of life or struggle to open up to a vision of building a Household of Faith and for St. John Neumann to be a resource and support in doing this.

Some important households and individuals that need mentioning:

It is important that **seniors** feel included in this process, as the wisdom and care they possess is unique and vital to learning together how to really be the People of God.

**Single-parent households** are not only necessary for this process, but welcomed with a special desire, because the struggles and joys of these homes are crucial for the parish to experience the reality of life today, and support is necessary for a single-parent household to succeed in raising Christian children. We warmly ask for your participation.

**Adult men**, singles, husbands and fathers, are needed as role models in the community of faith. In households with two parents, because of the busy schedules we have, fathers oftentimes feel that other issues and tasks for the good of their families should come before being part of the church community. We ask that fathers see Faith UNwrapped sessions as one of the best times to spend time with and grow closer to their children and to take advantage of that opportunity for their own good and the good of their kids.

**Young people** have something unique to add to our experience if we are striving to be a real family of faith. We ask that you give our parish a chance to let you feel included and valued. You may struggle to understand the faith, or feel distant, but wherever you are at, we want and need your voice.

**Single adults** often feel that they do not fit. There is a seat waiting for you and eyes and ears conscious of the fact that you may feel uncomfortable amongst many families with children. There is a place for you and we hope that you accept the invitation.

**Couples of different Christian beliefs**, such as a Catholic and Lutheran marriage, along with interfaith couples are encouraged to take part together. It is important that we make clear that all people of any faith are welcome in our community and to share similarities in beliefs and express difference of opinion.

We ask that no barrier, whether it be race, sexual orientation, anger with the church, or fear of ignorance of the faith, keep you from an experience that may be an opening to a new start or the feeling of community that comes from participation in Faith UNwrapped or other aspects of Whole Community Catechesis.

We want all people to have a home with us.

## A Quick Summary ...

- Whole Community Catechesis is a religious formation process for the whole parish that has been recommended by church leaders for many years.
- Formation of adults is the priority of parishes so that adults can help build Households of Faith. The most important teachers of children are their parents, especially in matters of faith.
- Religious formation is a life-long process. Christians are called to learn and grow in faith throughout life.
- Whole Community Catechesis has the liturgy and Faith UNwrapped (FUN) as the centerpieces. All parishioners are asked to attend liturgy weekly and Faith UNwrapped (FUN) once per month.
- The goal of Whole Community Catechesis is to create a Household of Faith where faith can be shared and lived out without fear of ignorance or embarrassment.
- All people are invited and encouraged to participate.