



FAITH  
FORMATION  
MODELS  
IN THE  
ARCHDIOCESE  
OF BOSTON

Secretariat for  
Evangelization and  
Discipleship







The greatest gift we can give a child is to introduce them to Jesus. How can our parishes best assist parents in introducing their children to Christ? How can we support parents through parish faith formation? Creative responses to these questions, within and beyond our Archdiocese, are an important component of evangelization.

Effective faith formation programs rely on a cohesive network of ministries and parishioners rather than one particular person or group alone. (Programs for children and youth will have limited success without parents and other adults who are on fire for love of Jesus and willing to share that love.) Enhanced faith formation programming begins with the renewal of every ministry and an intentional focus on helping parents grow in their faith and share their faith. This resource exists to describe various methods and models of faith formation which parishes have used to foster that renewal.

The following pages are a guide for parish leaders to learn about the various faith formation models currently being used in the Archdiocese of Boston. We cannot forget that parents and guardians remain the primary educators of their children. Parish programs exist as a resource to aid parents and families in sharing the faith not only with their own children, but also with other children, youth, and adults. Our parishes and programs should explore the interplay of evangelization and catechesis, consider the needs of those approaching the Church to prepare to receive the sacraments, and embrace bold and creative new solutions where appropriate.

This resource is meant to engage as many people as possible in an ongoing dialogue regarding best practices and new opportunities for faith formation programming. It is a response to the work many parishes have undertaken to reconsider their mission and vision as evangelizing parishes, in particular with regard to faith formation of children, youth, and families. **These models are not meant to be exhaustive or limiting, but rather a means of starting a conversation about adapting faith formation in order to best meet the needs of each parish community.**

If you would like to connect with parishes using these models, brainstorm other potential ideas, consider related logistical issues, or explore any other related questions or changes to your faith formation programs, please contact your Evangelization Consultant (Contact information is located on the back page).

Secretariat for Evangelization and Discipleship  
Office of Lifelong Faith Formation and Parish Support

# ADULT-CENTERED MODEL

## Brief Description

In this model, there are no traditional faith formation classes except for sacramental preparation. The focus is on helping adults grow in their faith. If the adults grow in their faith, the whole family will grow. It is characterized by family participation at Mass, adult faith formation opportunities, and/or small groups for adults. Typically sacramental preparation is the only element comparable to a traditional faith formation program. Children's Liturgy of the Word and a focus on youth ministry or youth small groups is often a component to support what is done at home.

### Assessment\*

**Prayer:** Focus on Mass, Learning prayer, Prayer in small groups

**Study:** Adult faith formation, Sacramental preparation

**Generosity of gifts and generosity to others:** Service as a means to engage families

**Evangelization:** Deliberate focus on Mass and sacraments

## Strengths

- Frees parish resources for intentional focus on Mass, adults, small groups, and key age groups or times of life
- Focuses heavily on adult faith formation

## Challenges/Difficulties

- Requires a mindset shift for staff and parishioners and is often a difficult transition
- Less opportunity to build a relationship with people prior to sacramental preparation
- Depending on how it is done, the model can raise concerns about children not attending Mass until First Communion

\* Based on *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*

# CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

## Brief Description

A Montessori-based children's faith formation model that seeks to create a physical space where both children and catechists can encounter God and respond to Him. For this reason, the space is called an atrium. (In early Christianity, catechumens were taught in the church atriums.) This model focuses on hands-on learning by providing lots of time for working with the materials to allow the child to grasp the concepts present in the lesson. Characteristic of the Montessori method, the children are asked questions to help them make connections between the various lessons they are being taught through the course of the year. The atrium is intentionally not structured like a classroom to allow children the ability to choose their work and spend time working with it. Level I, ages 3-6; Level II, ages 6-9; Level III, ages 9-12.

### Assessment\*

**Prayer:** Communal, Spontaneous, Liturgical, Scriptural, Meditation, Contemplation

**Study:** Bible, Biblical geography, Liturgy, Salvation history, Covenantal themes

**Generosity of gifts and generosity to others:**

Emphasizes good manners, Sharing tools and spaces

**Evangelization:** Children are given the Kerygma during the first 3 to 4 years

## Strengths

- Allows the child to discover God/lets God reveal Himself to the child
- Focuses on evangelization in the first three years before shifting focus to catechesis
- Encourages parents to adopt CGS practices in the home to aid the growth of their child
- Long term it is cheaper than traditional models due to the longevity of the materials
- Can pull the whole parish together to provide the resources needed for the atrium

## Challenges/Difficulties

- Initial start of an atrium is daunting: 90 hours of training, upfront costs of training and gathering materials, the time to make the materials

\* Based on *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*

# FAMILY FAITH FORMATION MODEL

## Brief Description

Family faith formation is designed to form all members of the parish family, enabling them to deepen their faith as intentional disciples of Jesus. The group gathers for family-based catechetical teaching and may be broken up into age appropriate groups for further lessons.

The intent is to help the parents educate their child, which makes it different from the Intergenerational Model. Every family receives a monthly packet to continue the faith formation program at home throughout the month. These materials can include: outlines of the subject matter to be discussed and prayed for at home each week, appropriate materials and activities for the children in the family, a family Scripture book to prepare for weekly Sunday Mass, and a family prayer book. Those preparing for a sacrament typically have additional class meetings, materials, and retreats.

### Assessment\*

**Prayer:** Mass, Prayer at home

**Study:** Monthly formation, Weekly at-home family lessons

**Generosity of gifts and generosity to others:** Can be a component – hopefully a fruit

**Evangelization:** Faith sharing, Lesson based

## Strengths

- Intentionally involves adults and empowers parents to take ownership of their children's spiritual formation
- Includes an emphasis on growth in discipleship and an emphasis on Mass

## Challenges/Difficulties

- Not every family will lead their family in completing the weekly lesson or attending weekly Mass
- Some parents may not feel comfortable or equipped to engage their child in this model; DRE's must create ways to equip them
- Needs significant leader input to create and distribute materials
- Limited time with program leaders and other participants

\* Based on *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*

# INTERGENERATIONAL MODEL

## Brief Description

In the lifelong, intergenerational approach to Catholic faith formation, the whole parish is invited, not just families with young children. Generations of Faith (GOF) is a particular program. Most parishes using this model of faith formation in the Archdiocese of Boston are following the GOF idea, but are no longer using the GOF materials. The model aims to focus on the community, the daily journey of faith, and the community's connection to the Eucharist. Often the monthly topic is intentionally connected to the music and homilies at Mass.

The model involves a monthly session. Every session begins with a meal and typically includes an opening activity for everyone before age-appropriate breakouts (K-4, middle school, high school, and adult). Each session typically runs 2 to 2 ½ hours. This is different from Family Faith Formation because all ages are invited to attend and it is not only focused on family activities and sessions.

### Assessment\*

**Prayer:** Connection to Mass, Group prayer

**Study:** Age-appropriate material for all age levels

**Generosity of gifts and generosity to others:** May be a component or fruit of the model

**Evangelization:** Small group faith sharing

## Strengths

- Intentionally involves adults, families, and the entirety of the community
- Empowers parents to take ownership of their children's formation

## Challenges/Difficulties

- Requires a team or plan for preparation of meals, production of materials, and facilitation of various age groups
- Monthly gatherings may not assist in promoting weekly formation at home or participation in weekly Mass

\* Based on *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*

# MASS-CENTERED MODEL

## Brief Description

The model is centered in participation in Sunday Mass. Students gather before Mass to learn the songs for Mass, learn about the Mass, prepare to participate in various liturgical ministries, and receive catechetical instruction from a program leader. Students attend Mass with their families. Afterward they participate in an age-appropriate catechetical session with small group leaders, engaging them in discussion and activities based on the Mass and the earlier catechetical instruction.

Assessment\*

**Prayer:** Mass

**Study:** The Mass, Sacramental Prep, Other topics as time allows

**Generosity of gifts and towards others:** An expected fruit rather than a program goal

**Evangelization:** Heavily focused on understanding the connection between Christ, Mass, and personal faith

## Strengths

- Intentionally focuses on regular participation in Sunday Mass and provides high-quality catechetical instruction for students and some parents
- Options for class at 2+ Sunday Masses

## Challenges/Difficulties

- Requires significant resources and leadership to create and execute
- Invites but does not particularly focus on adults (adult faith formation component may possibly be added in the future)
- Bi-weekly classes are designed to give the team time to prepare and eventually implement the program on off weeks at the other collaborative parish

\* Based on *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*

# PARISH-INITIATED HOME EDUCATION MODEL

## Brief Description

The parish supplies parents with training, weekly topics for discussion with their children, ways of incorporating Catholic practices and liturgical seasons into the daily life of the family, and supportive parish events to supplement what the parents are doing and keep them connected to the life of the parish.

This model is not a form of religious education in people's homes, but parents actively being responsible for their own child's education as a Catholic. This is also different from a parent who wishes to homeschool his or her child(ren) outside of the parish.

### Assessment\*

**Prayer:** Mass Attendance, Family prayer

**Study:** Parents teach children and can digress to what interests the child

**Generosity of gifts and towards others:** Service can be a component, often orchestrated by the church

**Evangelization:** Somewhat Kerygmatic, Conversations and witness of parents

## Strengths

- Focus on Mass
- Family time together
- Parents take responsibility for their child's instruction

## Challenges/Difficulties

- Requires time to train parents
- Difficult to follow up with all of the parents to see the progress of their children
- Hard to provide an example of a relationship with God to children if parents do not have one themselves.

\* Based on *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*

# TRADITIONAL MODEL

## Brief Description

K-10 classroom program with catechists and a faith formation director. Classes typically run weekly with holiday and summer breaks. Classes are typically anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes in length. Classes may take place at various times on Sunday or other weekday afternoons or evenings. Class times may allow multiple options for families or spread out the use of limited available parish spaces. Materials can be done at home periodically with the parents.

### Assessment\*

**Prayer:** Ideally something at the start or end of class

**Study:** Can be done well depending on program and catechist

**Generosity of gifts and towards others:** Service often a component

**Evangelization:** Not a typical strength of these programs, but it could be

## Strengths

- Regular class model
- Familiar to most people
- Has significant professional oversight

## Challenges/Difficulties

- Relies on a textbook type of education versus relationship based
- Typically limited engagement from parents, making it challenging for families to grow together in discipleship
- Limited ability to engage children in the life of the faith without parental involvement
- Limited participation from students and parents in Mass and the life of the Church
- Relies on a large cadre of well-trained volunteers which many parishes do not have

\* Based on *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*



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