

The following article was published in two parts in the parish bulletin September 13 and September 20, 2009:

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Now that our school and parish catechetical programs are back in session, I thought it important to examine how we are doing on passing on the faith to our young people. When I say “we”, I truly do mean all of us because the most effective catechesis requires a joint effort between the parents, who are the primary educators of their children, and the other members of the parish, beginning with me, the pastor.

When we speak of catechesis, we must remember that catechesis is a life-long activity. Through it, we not only give our children knowledge of what we believe, like we would if we were teaching a history or a math class, but we pass on the fullness of the faith which requires of us a total transformation of our lives. If any of us were to think that such a transformation can take place if we are limited to the hour and a half of Sunday Religious Education or even to the five-8 hour days that students attend our parochial school, we are only kidding ourselves.

True catechesis goes beyond the classroom and into every facet of our lives. This means our efforts in the classroom are for naught if the faith is not being **LIVED** in those moments outside of the classroom. The authentic example that parents and other family members give by making prayer and worship a priority in their lives and not just something that has to be done on Sunday before getting to “the really important things” leaves a long-lasting impact on each child. This is equally obvious as we continue our Catholics Come Home initiative we started last week – so many people have fallen away gradually as the faith seemed less important to them and as they accepted the dichotomy in their lives between what they professed to believe on Sunday and how they acted outside of church. We have the opportunity to reach our young people now, before they become the next generation of fallen-away Catholics.

In an effort to evaluate how we are doing in our catechesis, a standardized test (ACRE) was issued to the 5th and 8th graders in our school as well as to the 5th, 8th, and 12th graders in our religious education program. The analysis of the data is very telling. Our school did significantly better than other Catholic schools and our religious education program also surpassed other religious education programs. That being said, there were still some trends in the data, which indicated areas where we (parents, school, and religious education) still need to work.

	5th Grade				8th Grade			
	STSJP School Average	National Parochial School Average	Religious ED STP	National Religious Ed Average	STSJP School Average	National Parochial School Average	Religious ED STP	National Religious Ed Average
Percent Classified Advanced	25%	16%	0%	4%	78%	19%	25%	5%
Percent Classified Proficient	66%	60%	40%	39%	22%	57%	44%	37%

Percent Classified Needs Improvement	9%	24%	60%	57%	0%	25%	31%	58%
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For the grades tested, two major things stood out. First, very few students have considered a priestly or religious vocation (in one class, not a single person had and in the others no more than half the students had considered it). Our school and religious education programs need to be the fertile ground for the future good of the Church. Looking more closely at the data, the root cause of our vocation crisis is obvious – a substantial need for prayer as a family. Both in the school and SRE, only small percentages of students said they prayed together as a family. **Family prayer is the starting point for connecting the knowledge of the faith with our day-to-day lives.** It is not sufficient for someone to merely drop off a student for instruction; parents are still the primary catechists even when children are enrolled in a parochial school or catechetical program. We can't give what we do not have, so I am exhorting all adults to come to a greater knowledge and love of the faith as well.

In living lives that adhere to the principles of the Church, three areas stood out when students were asked questions about them on the test – cheating, foul language, and the acceptance of men and women living together outside of marriage. In many cases, several of our students didn't realize that abortion is *always* evil.

Parents, catechists, and I, as your pastor need to continue preaching the Gospel in season and out of season. We must help our children acquire a greater knowledge of the faith and the ability to apply that faith at all times and in all situations.

In the introduction of his letter on the role of families, Pope John Paul II said, "Knowing that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help to those who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives. Supporting the first, illuminating the second and assisting the others, the Church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family." My ministry as a priest is to serve you in living out your own vocations in the context of your families.

I want to highlight the **MULTIPLE** opportunities that we offer for you to grow in your knowledge of the faith (see below). We have a very active parish, and we offer something for everyone. Especially with all the resources available on our new website, you can even receive catechesis in the comfort of your own home at a time that works in your schedule.

Adult Faith Formation Opportunities

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| Bible Studies | FIRE Classes |
| Bulletin | Frassati |
| Donuts & Doctrine | Holy Family Conference |
| Faith to Chew On | Homilies |
| Family Initiative | Voices/Limerick |

In addition to all of these opportunities, I invite you to work on your own spiritual life. Developing the habit of daily prayer (even if it just starts with five minutes a day), rooting out sin from our lives, working

to acquire virtues, and frequenting the Sacraments are essential if we are to provide a convincing example to our young people. Without that authentic witness, the catechesis that we pass on is hollow, like that of the Pharisees. For this reason, Pope Paul VI accurately said, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” All teachers of the faith – whether parents or those appointed to positions within our parish – must not only pass on knowledge *of* the faith, but the fullness of the faith. **That takes authentic witnesses.**

Today, as we celebrate catechetical Sunday, we especially pray for those who serve us in various ministries of catechesis – both our priests as well as the laity who assist them. Emphasizing the assisting role that these catechetical efforts are to be for the parents who are the primary educators, the *General Directory for Catechesis* says, “Together with the primordial mission which parents have in relationship to their children, the Church confers the delicate task of *organically* transmitting the faith within the community on particular, specifically called members of the people of God.” This Sunday reminds all of us of the obligation we have to know and live our faith and to assist one another in this task. May we all respond willingly to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to grow in our faith throughout this next year; our children’s formation and perseverance in the faith depend upon it.

Mary our Mother and St. Patrick, our patron, pray for us!

Fr. Ted Dudzinski