

Bells of St. Mary

Calling all to Community



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What Happened to Our Parish School of Religion?

By Kathleen Garnica

Did COVID-19 dissolve our traditional PSR program? How are children being catechized this year? No fear, faith is growing here at St. Mary of the Assumption Church with a new program that has families bonding over God’s love in surprising ways. Welcome to the new family-based approach to growing in faith together: A Family of Faith, a family catechesis for our parish.

Months before the pandemic, Chris Stier, coordinator of religious education, along with the Education Commission, St. Mary staff, Parish Council and of course, Father Jim, were discussing ways to cultivate more community among families. The challenge of creating a religious education program that is not an extension of the school day but offers families ways to learn our Catholic faith together within everyday living resulted in the pilot study of a new program this past summer.

“While COVID-19 may have prevented us from using our limited classroom space in the traditional sense, it did provide us the opportunity to press in and seek the Spirit’s guidance on how to evolve our approach to children’s formation. The Holy Spirit directed us to move a bit quicker in evaluating, piloting and ultimately instituting A Family of Faith as the new approach to K-6 catechesis,” says Stier.

A Family of Faith from Sophia Institute was chosen as the foundational resource for our community-building model of formation. Beyond learning the truths of the Catholic faith and how to apply them, parents and children of all ages have the opportunity to build strong relationships through discussion and reflection on topics that matter in their lives as stated on the church website.

With a team of veteran PSR catechists to lead the planning and family groups, paired with easy-to-use materials, the Family of Faith model began October 2020. “Within 15 minutes of reviewing the materials, I said, wow, this is what we need to be doing!” said Nancy Frederick, Education Commission member, veteran catechist and lead facilitator for the program. “The materials are simple but profound. The goal is to make faith sharing part of everyday living and the center of the family. The ways to do that are fun, easy, and parents can select activities that match their family’s interests, learning style and schedule.”

To build community within the parents, The Family of Faith model centers on groups of seven to eight families with children in kindergarten through grade six. The first week of the month, a designated facilitator, meets virtually with the parents to discuss how each faith topic for the month can be illuminated through engaging activities and conversation within the family.



Nick and Heather Phillips’ children Alaina, Connor, Riley, Aiden, Lorelai and Lincoln participate in the November and December virtual community meeting.

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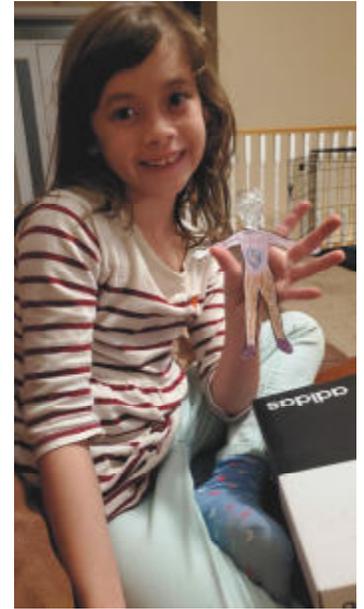
Weeks two and three focus on families trying a few of the activities within the course of their day or week. There is no set schedule of when to complete the activities, but usually one topic/activity per week is easily done. Parents become the witness and example of living their faith, bringing their children along with them.

Week four is time to gather for worship, food and fellowship –all together. The goal is an in-person gathering for Mass followed by a time of food and fun activities. Prior to the cold weather, families could easily distance outside but moving forward creativity will be needed to continue building family bonds.

To further build community among the families, the private group messaging app Slack is used to share families' experience with different activities. "In this way, the cute and sometimes funny reactions and responses by the children can be enjoyed by all. By sharing this creativity with the group, we make the journey of faith together," shares Stier. "Success is when all families feel like they belong to a caring community, where there is an interdependence that is based on the Spirit, and all members are growing in their faith." The Family of Faith model is based on a four-year cycle with

Profession of Faith is the theme for Year 1. I Believe in God, the Father Almighty; Made in His Image, but Fallen From Grace; In the Fullness of Time; Jesus: The Way, The Truth and the Life are a few of the faith topics for this year. All coincide with the articles of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Families are encouraged to pray before meals, learn basic Catholic prayers, learn about a saint of the month, targeted scripture, connection to the Catechism and vocabulary words. One popular activity is Car Conversations. With a captive car audience, parents hang the paper tag on the rear-view mirror which triggers attention to the activity. A parent may ask, "What is your favorite part of God's creation?" Then encourage each child to share what brings them joy about God's creation and how it shows us how marvelous God is. "We all spend time in the car, and this can be adapted to all ages. Conversations about your faith in your home (or in your car) are victories. Parents grow in knowledge and confidence of their faith and the natural result is the kids will too," smiles Frederick.

If you would like to learn more about A Family of Faith or register your family, go to the church website, stmaryassumption.church/family-of-faith or email chriss@stmaryassumption.church. Enrollment never closes.



Bre Tarlton shows her "I Reflect the Face of God" paper doll.



Ethan and Jack Cahall doing the Trust Walk activity where they learned that humans can let us down but God will never fail us.



Nick and Heather Phillips' children Alaina, Connor, Riley, Aiden, Lorelai and Lincoln playing Old Testament Bingo and participating in Build-a-Prayer activity.

The Round Windows...*A circle of life's emotions*

By Bill Roberts

Editor Note: This is the second in a series of stories that will appear in future editions of *The Bells*, delving into the history and meaning of the stain glass windows at St. Mary of the Assumption Church. Special thanks to Harriet Foley for her assistance in the article.

During Mass at St. Mary of the Assumption the congregation can see an image of the Holy Family as portrayed in the round stain glass window high above the tabernacle. And the priest saying Mass has a reminder of the Agony in the Garden captured in a second round stain glass window at the peak of the interior back wall of the church separating the sanctuary from the vestibule. These are two very different images of our Lord representing two opposing emotions, the warmth of family and the agony and pain of sin.

The third round window, at the peak of the church above the front doors, honors St Cecilia whose deep love for God moved her to give her life to him. The window was originally located in the choir loft in the Franklin church, a fitting location for the patron saint of musicians. As one of the most revered Roman martyrs, St. Cecilia had pledged her virginity to God, but her parents forced her to marry a pagan nobleman named Valerian. During the wedding, Cecilia sat alone singing to God, her true spouse. Thus, the patron saint of music.

When it was time for the marriage to be consummated, Cecilia told Valerian an angel of the Lord was watching over her and would punish him if he violated the vow she made to God. However, if he respected the vow the angel would reward him. When Valerian asked to see the angel, Cecilia responded he could if he was baptized. And as she said, after being baptized he saw the angel standing beside St. Cecilia, crowning her with a chaplet of roses and lilies, making it fitting for the only rose window in the church to be dedicated to St. Cecilia. Characteristic of Gothic architect, the rose window is divided by simple spokes or pedals originating out of a center opening of the window with a beautiful image of St. Cecilia in the center open of the window,

The window with the scene depicting the Agony in the Garden was originally on the north side of the nave (central side of the church) in the Franklin church above the baptismal font. The window shows Jesus kneeling at the Mount of Olives in prayer with an angel holding a chalice in the background. Jesus prayed to let the cup of suffering to pass from Him. In Luke 22:40-46, an angel appears to give Jesus strength to follow God's will for Him.

On the south side of the nave, above the side door of the Franklin church, was the window of the Holy Family which now is prominently displayed above the tabernacle. What makes this window unusual is Jesus is viewed as a young child. There is little mention of His childhood in scriptures. He is building a small cross with the help of a small childish angel symbolizing His future crucifixion. The artist shows Joseph holding an axe, depicting his trade as a carpenter. While Mary holds a spindle reflecting Her mission as the Mother of Jesus.



The Holy Family window



St. Cecilia window

Looking at the Holy Family window as it sits above the Immaculate Conception window you will see a clear contrast in the color of the windows. The *color-glass* process used in crafting the Immaculate Conception window, produces a milky color sheen. In this process the image is made by coloring the glass while in its molten state. The glass can then be used as is, ornamented, layered with other glass to create a different color, or painted upon with pigments.

The term "stain-glass" is a misnomer, as stain-glass is only one of the processes to produce color glass. The newer windows in the church made by the Zettler Company of Munich, Germany were crafted using the *stain-glass* process.

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The Mayer and Zettler studios perfected what became known as the “Munich Style” in crafting stain-glass. Using this method, detailed religious scenes were painted on glass to look like easel pictures, without obscuring the beautiful translucency of the glass, and using leaded seams that did not interrupt or intrude upon the scene portrayed. Also, they were able to present a three-dimensional perspective by making the background objects smaller than those in the foreground, giving the scene depth.

At the start of the 20th century, Mayer and Zettler became the world’s leading producer of stain-glass. Known for their design, clearness of glass, rich use of colors, and their conscious employment of the medium to realize harmonious decorative effects. They gained a reputation for technological innovations and familiarity with Christian iconography that allowed them to dominate the market for Catholic churches. Two of the closest churches with windows in the same style as those at St. Mary of Assumption are St. Raphael Church in Springfield and St. Lawrence Church in Cincinnati.

While this technology has made our windows vivid and consistent, it is the thought and planning that has positioned the windows, in both the Franklin and Springboro churches that has brought their stories alive and given them meaning.



Agony in the garden window

Bibles, Saints, and T-Shirts, Oh My! By Jeffrey Kremer

When I was planning for Jr. High youth ministry this fall, I knew things would look different. *Very* different. Of course, some of that was my own design. We were going to try out some new things, and the first thing was to really think about our mission in this time of crisis.

At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells us the mission: “Go forth and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” It’s a pretty clear cut mission: go and make disciples. That starts with our own journey of discipleship. We have to recognize that our faith is about following Jesus as disciples, and walking with others on the same road.

Easy to say. Hard to do. But super important, especially with all the craziness going on this year. Being a disciple is about being a light for the world – and that’s something everyone needs. But how do we get there?

That’s what we set to figure out. It means getting the teens familiar with the Bible. It means building a sense of fellowship and community. It means setting a clear vision for where we’re going.

The first step: getting Bibles.

Bibles can be expensive, and I operate on a limited budget. But having your own Bible is a great thing, and it’s especially important for young people to have a youth-friendly Bible.

This is where I include a shameless plug for a new, local religious store. I met Mike Knierim last year, when I was shopping for Catholic Youth Bibles that I could get to all of the teens. Mike is a retired police officer and new store owner of St. Michael’s Rosaries and Religious Articles, in Miamisburg. Like most small businesses, there are all sorts of challenges, trying to navigate through a world-wide pandemic. But they are still open several days a week, featuring a variety of religious articles, and especially Rosaries.

With the help of Mike, in the past two years, we’ve been able to order nearly 100 Catholic Youth Bibles to give to teens in the youth ministry. He provides these at a discount to our parish, for the work of evangelization.

Why was this especially valuable this year? It freed up additional funds, which could then be used to build community. St. Michael’s was awesome in getting us a great deal on Catholic Youth Bibles two years in a row. With the extra money we saved, we were able to invest in some cool ‘swag-wear’ for the teens.

This December, we handed out custom-designed notebooks, drawstring bags, and t-shirts, for all members of the St. Mary Jr. High ministry. Logos were designed with the help of Caoilinn Murphy, parishioner and member of the young adult ministry.

What’s next on the docket? Now that we’ve spent time building up our sense of community, this next semester is all about challenging the teens in their life of discipleship. All of us are called to be saints. Let’s pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit so we can reach that goal! **All Jr. High parishioners are invited to join. Please reach out to Jeffrey Kremer at 937-557-1711 or jeffreyK@stmaryassumption.church.**



St. Mary Jr. High ministry gear

Education Commission is the voice of parishioners

By Dan Darragh

Representing “voice of the people in the parish” is the mission of the Education Commission at St. Mary of the Assumption, according to Sarah Merkel who chairs the group.

The late Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk in a letter to churches in the archdiocese describes the commission as an advisory body subordinate to Parish Council, whose job is to assist the pastor in setting policy for the educational programs of the parish.

“Policy,” he said in his letter, “is a general guideline, whereas a rule is a specific implementation.” For example, “an educational program should be available to every member of the parish” would be a policy; however, a rule might be “parish-wide adult Bible studies are held during Advent and Lent.”

The Education Commission does not run the programs. That is the responsibility of “executives,” including the Coordinator of Religious Education and Youth Ministry staffs and the pastor. In other words, the Education Commission’s role is to offer advice to the executives in the immediate execution of the parish programs.



Screen shot of a virtual Education Commission meeting. Top row from left: Sarah Merkel, Kathy Kofron, Nancy Fredrick, Mike Walters and Liz Jensen. Second row: Mike Sander, Pegge Bellamy, Youth Minister Jeffrey Kremer, Coordinator of Religious Education Chris Stier and Melissa Koch.

The commission currently has nine official members. In addition, Chris Stier, the coordinator of religious education, Jeffrey Kremer, the youth minister, along with a representative from Parish Council usually attend the meetings that have been held virtually since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Members are appointed by Father Jim, and the commission usually meets the second Wednesday of the month.

“Advisory does not mean unimportant at St. Mary,” according to Stier. He says the way Father Jim implements the commissions means commission members are “boots on the ground to ensure executives hear the voice of the parishioners.”

“Education Commission members are usually directly involved in one or more education ministries and therefore can witness to their effectiveness says Stier. “The Education Commission is to the DRE and youth minister as what the Parish Council is to the pastor -- a group of individuals playing a vital role in helping the DRE and youth minister look out for the spiritual well-being of parishioners.

Ultimately, the pastor makes final decisions in regard to the direction of parish educational programs. Merkel says that “catechesis and faith formation are an integral part of any parish family. The different education opportunities and programs offered at St. Mary help make it a place for people of all ages to learn their faith and encounter Jesus. I love the St. Mary community, and it is an honor to serve in this small way.”

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Got an Idea for an Article?

Do you have an idea for a story about an individual, a family, an organization or an event at St. Mary of the Assumption that would be of interest to others in our parish family?

The Bells, a quarterly publication produced by several parishioners, is always looking for story ideas. Not only that, if you like to talk to people and always wondered what it would like to be a reporter, the Bells staff would love for you to join them.

To make story suggestions, try your hand at reporting, or both, contact:

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