



Prayer - Planning - Possibilities

Parish Project: WELCOMING AND BELONGING

Due Dec. 10, 2018

Do nothing out of selfishness; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also everyone for those of others.

Philippians 2:3-4

In speaking to parish leaders at vicariate meetings dedicated to faith formation in October 2018, Bishop Lawrence Persico acknowledged this is an especially tough time for the diocese to be thinking about welcoming and belonging.

"I'm sure you've heard people questioning how anyone could remain Catholic after the release of the Grand Jury Report," he said. "Many of us have been hurt by the fact that people we know and love were living double lives.

It's no secret that it's possible to worship at Mass without having any significant encounters with others who are present. It can be very isolating.

A first step to forming such strong, life-giving relationships with Jesus Christ and with each other is to be intentional about the sense of welcoming and belonging in our parishes today.

"It's not as simple as, 'Hi, come on in!'" Bishop Persico said.

The bonds of belonging have been tested."

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Deacon Steve Washek, executive director of faith formation for the Diocese of Erie, is organizing a series of regional meetings in early 2019 during which groups of parishes will brainstorm ideas about both welcoming and belonging, and then strategize about how to implement them. In preparation, he is asking that all parishes answer two questions for him by December 10:

1. Identify one concrete example your parish is either doing or would like to do to enhance its commitment to **welcoming**.
2. Identify one concrete example your parish is either doing or would like to do to enhance its commitment to **belonging**.

Definitions for both **welcoming** and **belonging** are included on the back of this page, as are a list of resources that will be helpful as parishes consider these topics.

Please email your responses to: ParishProject@ErieRCD.org no later than Monday, Dec. 10, 2018.

Pastors and staff at each parish have the flexibility to decide how the response should be created. Who should weigh in? How should they do so?

There is no right or wrong way to provide a response. It can be as long or as short as needed. The goal is to have a starting point for the work that will begin in 2019.

WELCOMING

At its root, true welcome is a spiritual discipline that reminds us of how we ourselves have been received by Christ. Welcome can be extended in countless ways. A smile, an introduction, an invitation are all small exercises that, as with any exercise, are building blocks to something greater. However, Jesus' idea of welcome is not a banal greeting, but a genuine interpersonal exchange through which he initiates a relationship — and eventually, friendship — with the one called. So, welcome is much more than saying "Hi," it is the first step in building a relationship with the one we have encountered.

BELONGING

Is a feeling that you are a value to the community. Those who feel they belong experience their parish and the church as a place that supports them throughout their lives in Christ. Research has shown that an engaged parishioner is one who knows he or she belongs. They are more likely to have a strong psychological connection to their parish, are more spiritually committed; are more likely to invite friends and family to parish events; organize their lives around their parish because through it, their faith has grown and deepened; have found opportunities to serve and help others in their parish; and have developed their most meaningful interpersonal relationships in their parish and the church.

RESEARCH ON ENGAGED CONGREGATIONS/CATHOLICS

Link to Gallup poll on an engaged congregation:

https://www.gallup.com/file/services/176372/St_Gerard_Majella_Engagement_Case_Study.pdf

Dynamic Catholic four signs of an engaged Catholic research:

<https://dynamiccatholic.com/learning/four-signs-research>

LIFELONG FAITH FORMATION RESOURCES

Family centered/lifelong formation: John Roberto

In working with many communities that take a whole family approach, we have found:

Most parents have not had faith formation since they were children. They lack confidence and are intimidated by catechetical textbooks. They need help to understand their faith better and to grow in relationship with Christ. Parents can't pass on what they don't have.

Families need to practice engaging their faith. Encouraging families to pray, talk about faith issues, and have more family time together is not enough. We need to provide a time and place for them to actually do it and learn what it looks like.

Parents want to pass on faith to their children, and will step up when we give them the tools and support to embrace their role. When we set higher expectations for parents, they will meet them.

Families can have fun learning about their faith! In our busy culture, families have less and less time when they are really present to each other (and having fun). Give this gift to your families.

www.lifelongfaith.com

www.vibrantfaith.org

www.faithformationlearningexchange.net

Other Resources:

- www.GrowingUPCatholic.com
- www.PastoralCenter.com
- www.ascensionpress.com/small-groups
- www.GospelLiving.org
- www.buildfaith.org
- www.bustedhalo.com
- www.formed.org (need subscription for this)

THE SIX RECOMMENDATIONS originally proposed by the Faith Formation Task Force, then later refined by the Faith Formation Implementation Team under the direction of Bishop Lawrence Persico, can be found at: www.ErieRCD.org/bishop/planning.html

The following brief summary of the recommendations was presented at the October 2018 vicariate meetings held in Erie, Hermitage and St. Marys:

Recommendation 1

We must commit to faith formation as a lifelong endeavor. We all need to be formed and to grow in faith throughout our entire lives.

Recommendation 2

We need a broadened vision of faith formation and a new approach to faith formation that encompasses all age groups and all audiences.

Recommendation 3

Every parish should be able to call upon or access trained professionals in various aspects of faith formation.

Recommendation 4

Diocesan leadership will develop standards for the selection, hiring and training of the leaders who are

assisting parish faith formation personnel, as they do for school principals. This will help ensure that parishes receive consistent service throughout the diocese.

Recommendation 5

We must consider how we might best serve the family. How can we best be present to families and support them as they live out their daily lives in the domestic church? How can we support couples in their married life?

Recommendation 6

We need to invite the laity to a fuller understanding of what it means to be an intentional disciple. How do we draw out their gifts in ways that help them live out their vocations in every aspect of their lives?

How do we live out these recommendations?

In four key areas. The four areas of encountering Christ that parishes in the Diocese of Erie will explore, one at a time, over the next four years, are:

1. Welcoming and belonging: building personal relationships conducive to growth in discipleship. This calls for authentic engagement with Jesus, other believers and the universal church.

2. Catechesis: imparting the content of the faith to people of all ages.

3. Sacramental preparation: encountering Christ in the sacraments and worship.

4. Service: witnessing to our faith through acts of charity and justice and in every aspect of our daily lives. This brings us to a deeper encounter of Christ in others.