

When Parishes Have Decided to Combine Religious Education Programs A Suggested Plan for the Merger

In order to facilitate the combining of religious education programs, the following steps are suggested:

Step One: Hold a meeting to announce the decision to combine religious education programs, and the reasons for the merger.

People taking part in the meeting should include the religious education leaders from each of the parishes involved and could also include one or two additional people from each parish. Ask the participants to develop a process for the merger. This document could serve as a basis for their consideration. (It's important that parishioners have some ownership of the process for merging the programs. Someone from the diocesan religious education department could also be part of this meeting if desired.)

Time Frame: Early February

Step Two: Announce to the parishes the decision to combine programs and the plan for the process of merging. Invite catechists from all parishes involved to continue as catechists in the combined program. (If the same number of catechists will not be needed for the combined program, invite some to team-teach, or assist another catechist, or be a substitute catechist, or help with special events. It's important that each catechist knows that their participation is valued.)

In order to avoid the perception that one parish is being absorbed by another parish, make every effort to present the process in terms of the parishes joining together for religious education.

Time Frame: End of February or early March

Step Three: Bring children together for one or two activities before the end of the school year so they can become accustomed to being together and become familiar with the physical plant where the combined classes will be held. If classes will alternate between two parishes, bring children together at each site at least once.

Encourage children at the host site to be welcoming and inviting.

Time Frame: Once in March and once near the end of the school year

Step Four: On the last day of classes for the individual programs, have a prayer service that includes a blessing and commissioning of the students and catechists.

For students, something on the order of, *“Take the gospel that you’ve learned here to a new place and share it as you continue to learn”*.

For catechists, *“A commissioning to continue ministry”*. This commissioning could be worded in such a way that it would refer to whatever ministry they will continue, whether as catechists in the combined program or in other ministries within their own parishes.

(The blessing/commissioning might include a reading from scripture about prophets or other disciples being called to a new place or a ministry not expected.)

Time Frame: Last day of classes

Step Five: Information about the newly combined program would contain the names of all parishes involved, listed in alphabetical order. Consider holding a contest to rename the Religious Education program, e.g. “Red Bank Area Catholic Religious Education.” [This suggestion is intended for style not content]

Time Frame: Ongoing, once the programs are combined

Step Six: In order to keep families and children connected to their own parishes once the programs are combined, plan family centered activities in those parishes. See separate page for suggestions to consider.

Time Frame: Begin planning during the summer, with activities being implemented beginning in the fall. It would be the responsibility of a core group from each parish to plan and implement these activities.

The diocesan religious education department is willing to help with this process in any way possible.

Suggestions for Family Centered Activities

Connect family centered activities with the liturgical year:

Blessing of the Advent Wreath in church and perhaps families bringing their own Advent Wreaths from home to be blessed.

An Epiphany prayer service or celebration where each family will bring “gifts” for the poor.

A Mardi Gras celebration before Lent.

A Family Retreat during Lent.

A Service Opportunity during Lent (or anytime) that parents and children can do together.

An Easter Egg Hunt on parish grounds.

Connect family centered activities with life events:

A blessing for students graduating from school.

A blessing for children who will be starting school for the first time, or a blessing for all school age children at the beginning of the school year.

A blessing for all children who have been baptized in the past year.

A blessing for married and engaged couples on Valentine’s Day, or the Sunday closest to Valentine’s Day.

A blessing for youth who will be getting driver’s licenses – or going away to school – or starting a new job – or going into the military.

Encourage youth to become involved in their parishes by serving as lectors, ushers, choir members, cantors, musicians, or members of parish committees.

Provide Table Prayers for families to use at home.

Create prayer partnerships for families who are preparing for the baptism of a child.

Create prayer partnerships for children who are preparing for sacraments.

Invite parishioners who are elderly or homebound or in nursing homes to be part of those prayer partnerships, both as pray-ers and as those being prayed for.

Schedule a parish picnic during the summer.