

## **Faith Formation: A Team Effort from Womb to Tomb**

One of the things that I've always tried to emphasize in my ministry as a priest is that all of us are "works in progress." What this means is that we are striving to grow every day in holiness; saints are something we strive to become.

On the one hand, there is a lot in the way: various messages we can get from culture and people in our lives saying other things matter more than God; the various temptations we have that cause us to sin; or focusing on just "living in the moment" forgetting that we are passing through this world preparing for eternity, while at the same time trying to make the most of our time here on earth by making it a better place as people of hope.

God helps us every step of the way; and deep down, humanity I believe does have a yearning for God. I think of the people of Poland who when Saint John Paul II visited them spontaneously cried out "we want God!" as a way of standing up to the Communists who tried to remove God from society. And we see such a capacity for good in people that rises to the surface.

The challenge though is that we strive to have the faith be something that continually grows, so it works in conjunction with the virtues of hope and love. This is why faith formation is so important for all of us.

It starts in the home; the Church has always taught that parents are primary teachers of the faith. Most of us learn about the faith first from family. But of course every family situation is different, and life circumstances change as we age; as we get older, it's up to us to also grow in the faith, which we do through prayer, through making good moral choices, through acts of love, and through our knowledge of the faith which we strive to grow in.

I've always felt that our parishes need to be hubs to help all people grow in faith. In part, that is why you've been hearing so much about the "Synod" that the Archdiocese is launching; starting with small groups for faith sharing this winter, and continuing later next year with an emphasis on the Eucharist, and in 2025 with an emphasis on faith formation.

At Saint Joseph's, in recent years we've been blessed with the hard work of Kayla Rooney, who served as Director of Lifelong Faith Formation for the past 5 years. Kayla had a passion for trying to have faith formation for all ages and walks of life, in particular striving to help parents be equipped with the tools to pass on the faith to their children while also growing in their own faith. It's been great to see outstanding speakers, events like the Catechetical Institute using our parish as a satellite parish, and retreats and other events for youths as well. Kayla prayerfully discerned taking a similar position at a neighboring parish at the end of August.

With that, we began the search for a new Director of Lifelong Faith Formation. I was privileged to work with a committee of involved parents along with Randy Haney our parish director and Kelly Roche, our school principal, as we interviewed candidates. Following the interview, we came to the consensus that Kyle Finken was the best candidate for the position.

I've known Kyle for years as pastor, and he worked here in pastoral care prior to the pandemic. Kyle has a passion for helping people who are hurting and grieving, and was outstanding in this job. With the pandemic upending pastoral care at the time though, he discerned taking a position at another parish. However when this position came open, Kyle shared he felt truly called by the Holy Spirit to apply.

This is not Kyle's first jog around the block in faith formation. He served as Director of Religious Education at two parishes prior to being at Saint Joseph's, and also is heavily involved at Saint Joe's as a father of three children, two of whom are still in our school. As such he's been very familiar with faith formation here at the parish, but also is very much aware of faith formation programs in other parishes, and also familiar with our parishioners. Kyle also has an incredible joyful spirit; it was great working with him while he was here, and I look forward to this new chapter.

In coming weeks Kyle will be reaching out to faith formation families, and also be looking in coming months on how to maintain our amazing program while also adjust it as needed for continued growth.

We also hope to hire a second full time employee in faith formation who will work with Kyle. The full description of the position has yet to be written, but it will entail working with youth, Confirmation, adult faith formation, and this member of our team will work with Kyle and myself to help the program continue to flourish.

Of course all this is done with the support of incredible parents who are instrumental in the programs success.

My hope is that in coming months and years, we can continue to help the program grow together, and emphasize how faith formation is truly "womb to tomb" with programs for people of all ages. Faith formation isn't just for kids or to get to confirmation; again it is something for all of us, and we are all from different walks of life and have different stories, and I truly believe we as a parish can continue to create things for all people that will help them.

Please join me in welcoming back Kyle as he takes the helm as our new Director of Lifelong Faith Formation. Thank you for your prayers and support during the process of our search, and please keep Kyle and our parish in your prayers as together, we strive to help all people on their journey to sainthood.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paul