

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### *What is Family of Faith?*

Family of Faith is our religious education program at Saint Vincent Ferrer. It is a parish-wide, intergenerational, life-long faith formation program that promotes faith growth at home through parish programs and more importantly through participation in church life.

- Parish-wide: We welcome and encourage everyone in the parish to participate.
- Intergenerational: People of all ages are needed to make Family of Faith successful. Family of Faith is not only for school-aged children and their parents; it is, also, for grandparents, teens who have received confirmation, young adults, and parishioners without children, to name a few — Family of Faith is for everyone. Children need to be integrated into all age groups of the parish community, not segregated into peer groups. The older generations act as mentors, models of faith, and offer wisdom beyond words to the youth. Additionally, the more mature parishioners benefit from the beauty, love, and awe the youth have to offer.
- Life-long: Faith is something that grows and matures beyond receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. Confirmation is not a graduation from religious education. Like most things in life, as we continue to mature, we need to learn continually. Otherwise, we run the risk of losing our faith if it isn't built upon and nourished regularly. As we travel through life we continue to evolve spiritually. How we approached life and made decisions as a sixteen-year-old is very different than how we approach life as a young adult, parent, grandparent, etc.
- Faith Formation: Our faith is not something we learn in religious education class once a week as a school-aged child. It is something that we continue to "form" as we experience life. **It is an encounter with Christ.** Family of Faith promotes the growth of faith at home, recognizing that the family is where children encounter Christ on a daily basis. Family of Faith uses parish preparation programs and participation in church life to equip families to not only hand down the faith that is so beloved to us as Christians, but to teach children to live the faith vibrantly in our modern culture.

### *What does a Family of Faith session look like?*

Family of Faith will meet twice a month during the school year (September – May). One session is whole-group instruction only. The second session consists of the following

- Community meal (lunch or dinner)
- Whole group learning
- Breakout sessions where attendees participate in learning stations about topics in an age specific setting.

Additionally, families will be given information and activities to complete at home. You can complete as many or as few of the activities as you wish. Family of Faith gives families the tools they need to help their family make the daily practice of faith a way of life. Your child's success in learning and living the faith depends to a great extent on whether the family is engaged in their faith beyond attendance in the faith formation program because faith is an integral part of family home life. We will teach the Catechism of the Catholic Church in a spiral manner through a variety of medium. That is, the central themes of our faith will be repeated each year, from different perspectives, in greater depth, at age-appropriate levels.

*What is the catechetical approach of Family of Faith?*

In the past 100 years or so there have been different approaches to delivering catechesis. There was an approach where catechesis was entirely focused on providing a positive experience but with little content or understanding of this experience. There was an approach where catechesis focused on memorizing a long list of facts about the faith which left little time or space for an encounter with Christ to enter the heart and transform the soul (remember the Baltimore Catechism?). While there are great things about both of these approaches and this might even describe your own encounter with experiential learning, these learning methods have been further developed and improved since that time. Experiential learning in an intergenerational format is recognized as the best and most appropriate method for achieving the goals of faith formation: to inform, to form, and transform people so that their faith may be a living, outward, and fruitful faith.

*What about the sacramental preparation programs?*

Preparation programs for the celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation will continue as connected programs. Children preparing for first Reconciliation & Eucharist will consist of meeting for Family of Faith sessions with families, and one additional Sunday morning a month for students only. Additionally there will be two Saturday morning retreats, one in the fall for Reconciliation, and one in the spring for the Eucharist. Children preparing for Confirmation will attend of Family of Faith meetings and one additional class a month (Thursdays evenings for 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and Sunday afternoons for 10<sup>th</sup> grade). Both 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students attend one retreat a year. See the calendar for the details for Communion and Confirmation.

*Will it be mandatory for parents to attend with their children?*

Yes, at least one adult must attend with children. When families participate in activities together, children are much more likely to be committed and successful at that activity. The same is true about religion. Families where parents make their faith a priority and show it by being involved are much more likely to have children that are committed and involved. Therefore, the best case scenario is when the entire family attends Family of Faith sessions together, children, mother, and father. We realize, however, situations will occur in which this is impossible — parents may have to work, parents might not see the value to coming to a faith formation session — in which case a responsible adult who is involved in the child's life, such as a grandparent, another relative, a godparent, or a family friend may attend in the parent's place.

*What will happen if a family misses a session?*

Missing a session on account of illness or other family emergency is bound to happen. Please try to attend a different session that month if you can. If that is not possible, please know that the information from the sessions will be emailed home once a month to all families. You will be able to run through the information at home with your child. Although it is not the same as attending as session and participating in the important social aspect of Family of Faith, it does offer a way to make sure your family gets all the information.

*How can we handle everyone that wants to participate?*

We offer sessions on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays at different times in order to accommodate different schedules. As we are limited to the number of people we can accommodate on any given day, we ask people to sign up for a specific session. However, if for some reason a family needs to change the session in a particular month, this is perfectly fine. We ask that you call or email the religious education office to inform the staff of the change.

*What happens if one of the parents is not Catholic?*

Non-Catholic parents are equally welcome to participate in Family of Faith if they are interested in being involved in this manner. If, however, a non-Catholic parent is not interested in participating, this does not preclude the rest of the family from doing so.

*Why aren't we using the classroom model like other churches use and the traditional way we used to do religious education?*

The intergenerational whole community model we use, what we call Family of Faith, is the method that has been used for thousands of years to teach people about Christianity and Catholicism and to help families grow in faith. The drop-off and pick-up model of religious education classes has only been widely used since World War II. The thinking was that classroom sessions arranged by age worked well for teaching kids reading, writing, and mathematics; why not use it for religion?

The classroom model for religion has not proven to be very successful, for a variety of reasons. Therefore Saint Vincent Ferrer and hundreds of churches across the United States and Canada have decided to return to our "roots". We are not implying that people have not worked hard enough or been doing a good job through the classroom model. Rather, the structure of the program, regardless of how hard we work, is not necessarily communicating or supporting what we believe our catechetical ministry is about. We often focus on the content of religious education and forget that the method and structure are also teaching aspects of the faith. Ideally, the Family of Faith method and structure serve to reinforce and support what is taught through the content of the program so that they are working together in communicating one single message.

*What is the catechetical vision we are trying to communicate both explicitly and implicitly?*

The six key points of our catechetical vision are:

- We are a community of followers of Christ
- Faith formation is a life-long process
- Parents are the primary sharers of faith with their children
- Participation in the worship and life of the church is essential
- Faith should be integrated into our daily lives and not a separate activity
- Our faith should inform and guide our actions

*Why is the Family of Faith approach better suited to achieving our catechetical goals?*

By gathering the community to engage in faith formation, we communicate that faith formation is a life-long process because people of all ages are engaged in this pursuit and that we are a community of disciples because we all come together to learn from the Master. By directing our catechetical activity

toward preparation for participation in the community's life and worship we establish a clear connection between catechesis and liturgy and structurally support such participation. By expecting parental involvement at the sessions and at home we communicate both the primary role of parents in their children's faith formation and support the process of integration of faith into our family life.

*How will my child benefit? How will my family benefit? How will I benefit?*

There are many benefits to your children and to your family as a whole. To name a few: meet more neighbors and parishioners with whom you worship at Sunday Mass, spend time together as a family engaged in a meaningful activity, have all your children come for faith formation on the same date and time, learn first-hand what your child is hearing and learning about our faith, grow in your own faith, learn and develop new family faith traditions.