

ADULT FAITH FORMATION

The Church's catechetical mission aims to help the faithful of all ages to grow in both human and Christian maturity, enriching the whole of life with the leaven of the Gospel. Consequently, appropriate goals and content will embrace all the faith dimensions of an adult life—for example, understanding and communicating the faith, skills needed for personal growth, the experience of family life, relationships, public service, and concern for the common good.

Our adult faith formation ministry must engage the particular needs and interests of the adults in each local community. To be faithful and effective it will offer, over time, a comprehensive and systematic presentation and exploration of the core elements of Catholic faith and practice—a complete initiation into a Catholic way of life. It will do so in a way that is accessible to adults and relates to their life experiences, helping them to form a Christian conscience and to live their lives in the world as faithful disciples of Jesus.

This integration of actual life experience, diverse adult learning needs, the study of Scripture, and the teaching of the Church's tradition will create a vibrant learning environment. It will also challenge the creativity of those who establish the direction, plan the content, and provide programs of adult faith formation. Meeting the challenge will be both demanding and rewarding. For guidance, we offer the following goals, principles, content, and approaches.

Three major goals guide and direct efforts in adult faith formation:

1. Invite and Enable Ongoing Conversion to Jesus in Holiness of Life.

In response to God's call to holiness, our faith and life as adult disciples are grounded in developing a personal *relationship with Jesus*, "the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:69, Mk 1:24). Accordingly, "at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. . . .' Catechesis aims at putting 'people . . . in communion . . . with Jesus Christ.'"

As its first goal, faith formation helps adults "to acquire an attitude of *conversion to the Lord*." This attitude fosters a baptismal spirituality for adults. It leads them to recognize and repent of sin in their hearts and lives, to seek reconciliation through the sacraments, and to embrace the invitation and challenge of an ever deepening faith in Jesus. It means putting on the mind of Christ, trusting in the Father's love, obeying God's will, seeking holiness of life, and growing in love for others. Deepening personal prayer is a significant means toward growth in holiness in daily life.

2. Promote and Support Active Membership in the Christian Community.

As adult believers, we learn and live our faith *as active members of the Church*. Our response to God's call to community "cannot remain abstract and unincarnated," but rather, "reveals itself concretely by a visible entry into a community of believers . . . a community which itself is a sign of transformation, a sign of newness of life: it is the Church, the visible sacrament of salvation." People find this community of faith in the parish and diocese, as well as in their families, small church communities, personal relationships, faith-based associations, and in the communion of saints of all times and places.

Accordingly, faith formation helps adults make "a conscious and firm decision to live the gift and choice of faith through *membership in the Christian community*," accepting "co-responsibility for the community's mission and

internal life." Adults not only receive the ministries of the Christian community, they also contribute to its life and mission through the generous stewardship of their gifts.

3. Call and Prepare Adults to Act as Disciples in Mission to the World.

The Church and its adult faithful have a *mission in and to the world*: to share the message of Christ to renew and to transform the social and temporal order. This dual calling to evangelization and justice is integral to the identity of the lay faithful; all are called to it in baptism. Accordingly, faith formation seeks to help each adult believer become "more willing and able to be a *Christian disciple in the world*." As salt of the earth and light for the world (cf. Mt 5:13-16), adult disciples give witness to God's love and caring will so that, in the power of the Spirit, they renew the face of the earth.

—excerpted from *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*

For more information about Adult Faith Formation opportunities in your area, please contact your (Arch)Diocese. Many dioceses and other Catholic organizations also offer classes in the areas of theology, ministry, spirituality and religious education.