

Dear Parishioners,

Every Catholic is all too aware of the dwindling number of Catholics practicing their faith today, but what really seems to strike people is that much of that dwindling number is made up of young people. While I do not claim to know definitively the root or the solution to this problem, it seems to me that the place to begin to address it is the place where faith is supposed to begin and where it is supposed to be first nurtured – the Catholic family.

The Catholic Church has always been clear in her teaching that one of the purposes of marriage is to bring children into the world, but she has also been clear that it is not enough to have children; parents also have the responsibility to raise their children in the faith. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), she puts it thus: “The fecundity of conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children, but must extend to their moral education and their spiritual formation. The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.” (CCC 2221)

And yet in many ways, for the last few generations, we have in fact been substituting the parish for Catholic parents. Many people, both clergy and lay, seem to think that sending children to a Catholic school or parish religion program constitutes raising them in the faith. The education and formation a parish provides is important, but if the foundations have not been laid for the child’s faith in the family, and if there is no ongoing formation in the family, the parish has nothing on which to build.

After years of personal prayer and reflection, a year of discernment with our CRE John David Kimes, and consultation with members of our parish Board of Education, Mike Jacks our principal, and other parish members, I have decided to begin the implementation of a different approach to our religious education program. While there will still be classes offered for children, emphasis will be put on providing education and formation to parents, so that they will be able to educate and form their children.

We are calling the program *Loreto: Forming Families in the Faith*. Because this approach to catechesis and formation is fundamentally different from past years, we plan to implement it in stages, over the course of several years. The entire program, with curriculum and schedule, will be laid out in the parent handbook and on our website, so here I will only sketch out what will happen this year.

The backbone of *Loreto* will be the classes for parents. These will be held the first Wednesday of the month, September through May, from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m., and will focus on their education and formation in the faith and equipping them confidently to teach the faith to their children. While the parent classes are in session, supplemental lessons and devotions for children (Pre-K to 8th grade) will be offered as well. By the way, since student instruction will come from parents and the Wednesday meetings, we will no longer need to offer our previous CCD program. *Loreto* is intended for all families, regardless of where the students attend school. I warmly invite all parents to take advantage of this opportunity.

The second part of *Loreto* will be what we will call community events. These will be events for the entire parish – social events, service projects, devotions – that strengthen our parish as a community of faith.

We will, of course, continue to offer classes and activities to prepare students to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Requirements for receiving the sacraments will be posted on our website and included in the parent handbook.

Participation in *Loreto* is voluntary. Following Christ is a free act, and so also is fulfilling the responsibilities of our vocations. I believe that most Catholic parents want to pass their faith on to their children, but may not know how or feel confident in their abilities. It is my hope that our efforts in *Loreto* will help you in both areas. I invite, encourage, and challenge you to take part in this program, and become the Catholic parent the Church envisions you to be.

In Him,

Fr. Stef

P.S. For more information and registration, please visit www.stcatherineofsiena.org/family-catechesis, or contact John David Kimes at extension 21 or jdkimes@stcatherineofsiena.org.