

**Holy Family Parish  
Concord, Massachusetts**

June 2006

Dear Parishioners,

How about that Da Vinci Code business? (And a business it is!) It's amazing and sad that a novel, a piece of fiction, can so easily cause life-long Catholics to lose their bearings about their beliefs and their church's teachings. I believe that some of the questioning surfaced by Brown's novel has been fueled by the mistrust that grew out of the sex abuse scandal and the pain of closing parishes. But perhaps more significant is the reality that many Catholic people simply do not know how to speak as adults about their faith. The faith expression of many Catholics enjoys no more than an 8th grade formation, with Confirmation class being their last formal moments of catechesis. While we recite the Creed over and over again at Mass on Sundays, many Catholics would be hard put to offer any explanation of the creedal statements that roll off our tongues every week. The Catholic Church does not have a good record of adult faith formation and in those places where efforts have been sincerely made the response has often been minimal. This is just one (major) reason why I believe that Generations of Faith (GOF) is so important for Holy Family Parish.

GOF is a catechetical effort aimed at lifelong, intergenerational growth in faith formation. GOF presumes that NONE of us has ever learned all there is to learn about our faith. GOF is intended for all the people of our parish. While the program certainly includes religious education for all children and sacramental preparation for our young people (First Communion, First Reconciliation, Confirmation), it is a program that regularly includes the needs of the whole parish community from the time after Confirmation through the senior years.

This coming year's program includes a variety of topics:

- We will begin in October with a look at the Creed: what it means to believe and what we mean when we say, "**We believe in one God...**" Why does the Church have a creed? What does it mean for us today? How do we name God?

- In November we will study the **Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick**: what happened to "last rites"? when should someone be anointed? when do we "call the priest"? why do we call the priest? what if the priest is not available?

- For December, we will focus on **Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of the Church**: who is Mary in the history of salvation? how do we pray to her? why do we pray to her? what are Marian devotions?

- In January we will focus on **Prayer**: why do we pray? how do we pray? what if I don't know how to pray? why are my prayers not answered?

- The March session will look at what we mean when we say that "**We believe in Jesus Christ...**" Who is the Jesus of history? of faith? What is his relationship to the Trinity? to us? How can we know him today?

- Continuing our three-year plan, we will spend the year's last session looking at part of Holy Week: the **Liturgy of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday**. Having studied Holy Thursday and Good Friday in the last two years we will focus on this most important celebration on the church calendar.

- The GOF year will begin with an **outdoor Mass and picnic** in September and a **Procession and Crowning of the Blessed Virgin** in May, followed by an ice cream social.

If you wonder if you, as an adult, are in need of any of this catechesis, imagine that a neighbor or coworker approaches you and asks you to explain what the Church teaches about any of the topics outlined above. If you can already give a cogent, substantial response then please call me immediately because I would be happy to have you on our catechetical team - I mean that! If you're not sure you know what you'd say, then perhaps GOF is just what you need...

Up to this point in my letter, I've been addressing all adults in our parish, regardless of whether or not they have children at home. The following is especially for parents of children in the parish.

Unfortunately, some parents of middle school and high school students believe that because their children are old enough to come to GOF on their own their presence as parents is not necessary. I hope you read my reflections above and take them to heart. In addition to your own need for catechesis, I can think of no better way for you to teach your children the need for life-long faith formation than for them to observe you pursuing it yourself. Since all levels focus on the same topic each month, the possibilities for continuing the discussion on the way home -and at home- are multiplied by your presence and involvement. At your child's baptism you promised to be faithful in raising your son or daughter in their faith and knowledge of God. I pray that you will continue to be faithful to the promise you made before God and the church.

I know that GOF is not without critique. The complaints come from those who think GOF does not offer enough and from those who think GOF demands too much time from a family's schedule. We understand both issues and although they seem to contradict each other, we see what folks are telling us. We are committed to this form of faith formation for the parish. Those who find the program doesn't offer enough can certainly supplement the parish efforts with the take-home materials and if you need more than that, we'd be happy to point you in the right direction. We do hope, very much, that you will nonetheless use GOF as the base of faith formation for your family and children. I ask those who find it difficult to set aside 2.5 to 3 hours a month to GOF to look at all the other demands that school, work, sports, community involvement make on your time. In light of that, I hope that you will see that several hours, once a month, is not really asking too much.

Many of our families are very pleased with GOF and find it just the right program for a family in Concord, with a busy schedule, working towards growing in faith. I believe that the more we all give ourselves to this effort the more successful it will be for the parish and for individual families.

Sincerely,

Fr. Fleming

### **P.S. especially for parents of children preparing for sacraments**

Some families have begun to take "sabbatical leaves" from religious education! By this I mean those families who only present their children for religious education in the "sacramental years" of First Communion and Confirmation. Please let me offer a few thoughts on this matter.

#### **• First Reconciliation and First Communion**

Faith formation is a life long reality and in our parish it begins with **pre-K!** Young children begin learning about God and the church in our pre-K and K groups. Our formal program for children begins in grade one and it is particularly important that children who will be coming for First Communion have the benefit of this prior first grade experience.

- **Confirmation**

Confirmation is a **two-year program** for high school students (grades 9 and 10) and it presumes a student's prior participation in our middle school program. As at their regular school, students are not allowed to skip middle school and jump into high school after several years of no formal education: the same applies to religious education.