



faith formation  
NEW INITIATIVES 2023

# Strengthening Our Catholic Families and Church

Photo by Grand Knight of Columbus, Mark de la Torre

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**H**ow are we doing as Catholics in today's world? Recent statistics reveal that among Catholics in general, there is a steady decline in church attendance and that our youth and their parents are walking away from the church as early as age 13. Gallup reports that from 1955 to 2017, weekly church attendance by Catholics steadily declined to the tune of 75%. Catholics, ages 21 to 29, declined, and older Catholics 50 years and older have also declined since 1955, "leading to the current situation where no more than 49% of Catholics of any age category report attending church in the past week" (Catholics Church Attendance, Gallup 2018).

Therefore, as the Faith Formation office reflects on the needs of our diocese here in Northern Nevada, it is vital to strengthen authentic encounters with Christ to support evangelization and to embrace what it means to live out our catholicity. In support of Bishop Daniel Mueggenborg's request to focus as a diocese on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Eucharistic Revival with the Meaning of the Mass Guide and the emphasis on promoting Vocations, a few additional initiatives are being implemented in 2023-2024. These new initiatives will embrace what is already being done while supporting faith formation at all levels within our diocese. The implementation of family catechesis for religious education, lowering the age of confirmation to middle school, and an invitation for parishes to welcome the Catechetical Institute, Franciscan at Home for parish-wide faith formation will offer a variety of ways to root ourselves in seeking God's will for our lives.

After several months of consultation and prayer with pastors, catechetical leaders, and Catholic school administrators, it has been advised that a family-centered catechesis faith formation model will be used to promote and strengthen the Domestic Church. In providing parents with practical resources to address the struggles of raising children and adolescents in society with a Catholic perspective, it will open a door to allowing God to be the center of the household. This also provides an opportunity to give adults the ability to grow in community within the church family. It offers parents the option to gather in small groups to share their faith and stories of their struggles and to offer witness to the positive ways God is present in their lives.

In The Domestic Church, Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. (CCC 1655-1658) The Church is nothing other than "the family of God." Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and "a school for human enrichment." Here one learns endurance and the joy of work; fraternal love; generous, even-repeated, forgiveness; and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life.

When we are baptized in the church as an infant, it is required by our parents to commit to finalizing the initiation of the sacrament with Confirmation. The parents, along with the godparents agree to raise their child in a Catholic home. The completion of the baptismal grace with the seal of the Holy Spirit points a way to God, which leads to an encounter of the heart. The sacrament of Confirmation is not a child's choice but that of their parents. With the trials many families are enduring and reflecting on the challenges our youth are facing in today's world, we and many other dioceses are advocating to offer the sacrament of Confirmation in middle school. This allows the adolescent to be equipped with the grace of the Holy Spirit as their guide

as they enter high school. This transition benefits the newly confirmed to live out their faith as active members in the Mass, as lectors and Extra-ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Teens will no longer need to balance confirmation preparation classes and youth ministry events with the demands of high school. Youth ministry in parishes will be seen as engaging, offering teens a way to dialogue about their faith, serve in their community, and embrace their role in evangelization.

Lastly, as the Faith Formation Office strives to offer ways to accompany parishes on their journey with the Lord, several months of research and reflection have been considered. With the invitation for parishes to partner with the Catechetical Institute, Franciscan at Home, participants will be offered a variety of ways to grow in their faith. With over 100 dioceses participating, this bilingual program offers small-group faith-sharing opportunities, ministry certifications, family and adult catechesis, in person or virtually at a reasonable cost. Currently, there is a diocesan team that will be attending training in July at the St. John Bosco Conference. Once this training has been completed, the faith formation office will design a diocese list of recommended tracks that parishes may implement. Then over the next several months, parishes will be encouraged to host a team that will be trained in how to offer sessions at the parish as well as to create additional track sessions that would support specific parish faith formation needs. In conclusion, at the January 2024 Reno Conference, a representative from the institute will be offering sessions to parish teams on how best to implement this wonderful faith formation resource.

As we walk this faith journey together, please keep our diocese in your prayers. As we call on the Holy Spirit to grace our lives, we seek God's mercy as we root ourselves at the foot of the cross. †