



Catechesis Supplement

‘You’re wrong’—A great conversation starter?

By Ken Ogorek

Recently, a parish catechetical leader told me what a parish council member said when arose the topic of adult catechesis—of lifelong faith formation. The council member said, “I don’t need to study the faith. I learned it all when I was a kid.”



“May I suggest we start with the nuclear option?”

It may sound like a scorched-Earth approach, but my first thought regarding what I’d say to that council member was, “You’re wrong!” Like drafting a snarky e-mail then thinking better of sending it, though, I realize that such an outburst is unlikely to keep a fruitful discussion going.

So, what to say? What to say when a person makes a statement so obviously off base? Internally, at least, maybe start with the basics?

An 11th and 12th Commandment?

We tend to equate learning with acquiring new information. And while it’s true that in catechesis a person can and often does hear information that’s new to her or him, much of lifelong faith formation consists of revisiting doctrinal or moral content learned long ago—but with fresh eyes. It leads people to ponder. “How have I changed since the last time I reflected on this truth? What experiences have I had that make me more receptive or appreciative of this insight that God is sharing with me?”

It’s not like the Church says “You know, there’s an 11th and 12th Commandment, but we’ve been waiting till you turn 40 to tell you about them.” Rather, when we hear the refrain, “I know this already,” we might say words to this effect: “I’m sure you do, and that’s great. But I bet you’ve changed a bit since the last time you asked God to help this teaching sink deep into your heart and soul. So, let’s take another look at it—together.”

A way Jesus speaks

As Catholics, we know that both sacred Scripture and sacred tradition together comprise the one word of God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #97). We also know that when we reflect on a Bible passage or a teaching of the Church, Jesus sometimes speaks to us in a direct and personal way.

So, to say, “I don’t need to study the faith,” is like saying, “I don’t need to make use of a key way that Jesus might be sharing his thoughts and feelings with me.” Not exactly a rallying cry for a disciple of our Savior and Lord.

Our witness and invitation

What’s the best way, then, to counter this misperception of some Catholic adults that catechesis is just for kids or Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults participants? Your personal witness can be very powerful here.

When you share how meaningful it is for you to participate in adult catechesis—to deepen your knowledge of and relationship with Jesus—your example can have a life-changing impact on your fellow parishioners by God’s grace and mercy. Don’t hide your lamp under a bushel basket.

The next time an adult catechesis opportunity at your parish arises in a conversation (maybe because of your invitation) and you hear words like “I don’t ...,” don’t succumb to my temptation—to proclaim a loud and blunt “You’re wrong!”

Let folks know that even though they learned a lot when they were kids, they can’t go wrong revisiting Church teaching prayerfully and reflectively. That bit of honey will likely be more attractive than the vinegar I was tempted to share.

(Ken Ogorek is the archdiocesan director of catechesis. He can be emailed at kogorek@archindy.org.) †

Seminarians, parishes benefit when future priests help in catechesis programs

By Sean Gallagher

Seminarian Samuel Hansen enjoyed the two years he spent at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis before graduating last spring.

“Prayer life in seminary is great,” he said. “It’s what sustains you. It’s the heart of your relationship with God.”

But in his last year at Bishop Bruté, Hansen was assigned to go forth from the seminary to serve on Sunday mornings as a catechist at St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis.

He co-taught with a parish volunteer catechist a class of students preparing for their first confession and first Communion.

Last spring, after teaching them for several months, Hansen was with them at that special moment when they received their first Communion.

“We hope that everyone loves the Eucharist,” he said. “That’s the one prayer that every seminarian has for the people at the end of the day. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the faith.”

“To hear [them] come back and say that it was a profound and peaceful moment gave me hope and clarity for my vocation. I really was doing the most important thing.”

Hansen and other seminarians in their last two years of formation at Bishop Bruté take part in parish ministry as part of their pastoral formation for the priesthood.

More parish ministry assignments await seminarians in formation at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad.

The experiences are integral for the formation of future parish priests for the archdiocese and a benefit for the parishes in which they serve.

‘You have the ability to guide them’

Father Andrew Syberg, vice-rector of Bishop Bruté, oversees the college seminary’s pastoral ministry program in which seminarians are sent to parishes



Then-transitional Deacon Matthew Perronie has fun on July 25, 2021, with Grant Dierking, second from left, Evan Campbell and Nathan Hyun during an outing at Blackiston Bowl in Clarksville for the youth group of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany. (Submitted photo)

in Indianapolis to assist in catechetical and other programs.

The early part of the COVID-19 pandemic put the effort on hold.

“COVID helped reveal why [the program is] so helpful,” Father Syberg said. “During COVID, [the seminarians] couldn’t do anything. Ministry was basically shut down. So, we were missing this big piece of formation.”

COVID restrictions were only fully removed at the start of the 2021-22 formation year. That’s when Hansen was assigned to St. Monica, which he said helped him “really keep in mind what day-to-day parish ministry would look like.”

Hansen said being a sacramental preparation catechist helped him gain skills in applying what he had learned in college to a classroom of grade school students.

See SEMINARIANS, page 12

Longtime catechists feel ‘blessed to walk with people on their faith journey’

By Natalie Hoefler

In a supplement on catechesis, it is fitting to shine light on those who pass on the faith in an official capacity in central and southern Indiana.

This article highlights three longtime parish catechetical leaders in the archdiocese: Deacon John Jacobi of St. Michael Parish in Bradford and St. Bernard Parish in Frenchtown; Maurica Clouser of St. Jude the Apostle Parish in Spencer and St. John the Apostle Parish in Bloomington; and Stephanie Whitley of Holy Angels Parish in Indianapolis.

Each has been involved in catechetical ministry for 30 years or more. Each feels passionate about their calling to teach the faith. And each feels it is a blessing to walk with others in their faith journey.

‘How blessed I am’

Deacon John Jacobi felt a call to catechesis from a young age, but “I just didn’t know what to call it,” he said.



Youths from several parishes, including St. Michael in Bradford and St. Bernard in Frenchtown, enjoy a day at the Cincinnati Zoo after participating in a mission trip. Deacon John Jacobi, director of religious education and youth ministry for both parishes, is standing at far left in the back row. (Submitted photo)

“I’ve always felt very close to the Church,” he said. “Growing up in the Church was always something I was very comfortable with. I loved taking part in Church activities and going to Mass with my family.”

Deacon Jacobi now serves as director of religious education (DRE) and youth minister at St. Michael Parish in Bradford and St. Bernard Parish in Frenchtown. He was ordained to the permanent diaconate in 2017 and also serves as deacon at both parishes.

He became active in catechesis 31 years ago as a volunteer teaching the faith to eighth-grade youths at St. Michael. Four years later, the parish DRE position opened.

“Our pastor at the time asked me if I could finish out the year by opening and closing the building in place of the DRE, who left in February,” he recalled.

He agreed and also expanded his catechesis to include all middle school youths as the parish searched for a full-time director of religious education.

Meanwhile, Deacon Jacobi was preparing to start a new position at a grocery store where he worked.

“But I felt very much called to the DRE position,” he said. “My wife and I prayed about it. I applied, and I got the job.”

He went back to school, earning a bachelor’s degree in pastoral ministries from Spalding University in Louisville, Ky., and a master’s degree in theological studies from Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad.

As he received more education, the parish gradually added youth ministry then Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) to his responsibilities.

Eight years ago, Deacon John was also hired as DRE and head of youth ministry and RCIA at St. Bernard.

He noted that the faith remains the same when it comes to catechesis.

“But efforts to reach out to children and youths

See CATECHESIS, page 12

Conference draws people from various backgrounds who serve youths

By Sean Gallagher

Parish youth ministers can play an important role in forming teenagers so that they embrace the faith now and as they grow into adulthood.

But leaders in the archdiocesan Office of Youth Ministry know that a wide spectrum of people are needed to accomplish this important goal in the life of the Church.

That's why the office recently held its third annual Into the Heart Conference on Aug. 13 at Marian University in Indianapolis. The event's 130 participants and presenters came from a variety of backgrounds, from youth ministers to teachers, athletic coaches and parents.

"The accompaniment of young people does not fall to a single youth minister or a core team of volunteers," said Paul Sifuentes, the office's director. "The entire community is called to accompany our young people on their journey of faith and as they encounter the Lord. When ministering to a community, it is not about finding the right program but rather it is about calling, equipping and supporting people."

Shannon Wimp Schmidt, a keynote speaker at the conference, appreciated its approach, calling it "uncommon," in an interview with *The Criterion*.

"Most of the time, we kind of get siloed in the Church and in ministry," said Wimp Schmidt, a parish vitality coordinator for the Archdiocese of Chicago. "There are benefits to that. We can get really focused on things."

"But the beauty of this approach is that you can come and share across different ministries to talk about best practices that might translate from one to another, and to really think outside the box."

Wimp Schmidt, a mother of four, has served youths

in a variety of settings, including previously as a youth minister at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Carmel, Ind., in the Lafayette Diocese.

"There's so much that translates across," she said. "Things I learned about being an effective teacher helped me be a better youth minister. Things I learned about youth ministry re-shaped how I thought about the classroom, seeing it as a welcoming place to do ministry, rather than just a place to disseminate information."

Ellice Bedel, youth minister of St. Susanna Parish in Plainfield and a mother of five, attended the conference with two youth ministry volunteers from the Indianapolis West Deaneery faith community.

"The sessions applied to my work here at the church," said Bedel. "They also spoke to me as a parent, too."

Bedel has served at St. Susanna for 15 years. That experience, combined with her life as a mother of



Marian University students who are part of the school's San Damiano Scholarship program pray with Shannon Wimp Schmidt before she gives a keynote address on Aug. 13 at Marian during the archdiocesan-sponsored Into the Heart Conference for people from many backgrounds involved in the lives of youths. (Submitted photo)

identifying themselves as Catholics, Spahr is encouraged by a group of teens in her Bloomington Deaneery faith community who are looking forward to taking part in the next World Youth Day in 2023 in Lisbon, Portugal.

"They're willing to share their feelings and thoughts about what's going on in the world," said Spahr, who attended the conference with volunteer catechists from St. Agnes. "A lot of them are not on board with a lot of the stuff that's happening [in society]."

"It's really uplifting for me, because it's terrifying to think that even my own children may not choose to identify as a Catholic. It's that important to me to live out your faith. So, it's great to see that in the teenagers at St. Agnes."

"There is still that fire, that love of Jesus and a willingness to come together for youth group on Wednesday nights just to talk about the Gospel. I look at that as a very big win."

With a high value being placed on accompanying Catholic youths by people like Spahr, Bedel and other participants, Sifuentes sees the Office of Youth Ministry offering the conference in the future.

"The need to inspire and equip adults [who work with youths] is not going away," he said. "And this event is one way to help address the need."

(For more information on the archdiocesan Office of Youth Ministry, visit www.archindyym.com.) †



Participants in the archdiocese's Office of Youth Ministry's third annual Into the Heart Conference have a group discussion during the Aug. 13 event at Marian University in Indianapolis. (Submitted photo)

A love of a lifetime and a thank you to God

By John Shaughnessy

The question that Tom Flaten asked himself is one that all people in a serious romantic relationship eventually have to consider:

Is this the person I want to spend the rest of my life with? Flaten thought of the woman he was dating at the time, Cindy Ward, and kept coming back to this answer, "When I'm with her, life is great, it's fun, I love it. When I'm not with her, my heart aches. I chose life with her."

Following that conversation with himself, Flaten had another one with God.

"I prayed to God, 'She's your gift to me. We're our gift to each other. So, if she's ever taken from me, I know it's your will. And if she falls into illness or anything like that, I promise I'll stay by her, God. I'll be there for her.'"

Recalling that conversation with God from more than 30 years ago, Flaten says, "That's ultimately what happened."

For 30 years, Tom and Cindy Flaten had the marriage of their dreams, one filled with joy, love and faith. Cindy served as the director of faith formation at Christ the King Parish in Indianapolis for 25 years, and Tom helped with the parish's music ministry. They supported each other in their efforts to bring others closer to God, and Tom was also there for Cindy when she was diagnosed with brain cancer.

He also kept his promise to God, caring for her until she died on Christmas Day in 2021.

"She was in hospice at home," he says, choking up with emotion. "I took care of her."

While the heartbreak continues in many ways for Tom, he's also tried to find ways to honor her life, her love and her faith.

One of the ways he's done so was to hold a golf outing in her memory this summer, with the proceeds of more than \$4,500 going to the archdiocese's Catechesis for Discipleship Endowment Fund, which helps parish catechetical leaders develop professionally and spiritually, which always was a goal of Cindy.



For 30 years, Tom and Cindy Flaten of Christ the King Parish in Indianapolis had the marriage of their dreams before her death on Christmas Day in 2021. (Submitted photo)

"Her faith was so important to her that she embraced it and made it her career," Tom says. "She had a great joy and fulfillment when she brought people to God. She would see this as something that was an offer to God, and she'd be very happy."

As the archdiocese's director of catechesis, Ken Ogorek knew Cindy well and admired her efforts to grow her own faith as much as the faith of others.

"Cindy was always conscientious about her own ongoing formation," Ogorek says. "I was blessed to participate in several professional and spiritual development experiences with her over the years. In fact, Cindy was poised to attend a conference—with the help of this endowment fund—when her illness made that no longer feasible. So, helping us grow this fund to honor the memory of such a catechetical leader as Cindy is a very fitting tribute."

The endowment benefits parishes in all 11 deaneries in the archdiocese, Ogorek says.

"Catechesis is so important, and parish catechetical leaders play a pivotal role in making good catechesis—womb to tomb—available in all 126 of our parishes," he says. "Our parish catechetical leaders need effective, ongoing formation and training; that's how the Catechesis for Discipleship Endowment Fund helps."

Ogorek notes that one of the ways the endowment makes a difference is that it helps pay for parish leaders to attend the St. John Bosco Conference for Evangelization and Catechesis at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Steubenville, Ohio. In July, 19 people from the archdiocese attended the conference.

"Ours was one of the largest groups there," Ogorek says. Paul and Clara Kachinski have attended the St. John Bosco Conference and have seen the difference it has made in their own faith lives.

"Paul and I have continued learning and growing in our faith," Clara says. "It's the most important thing in our lives, the most precious thing."

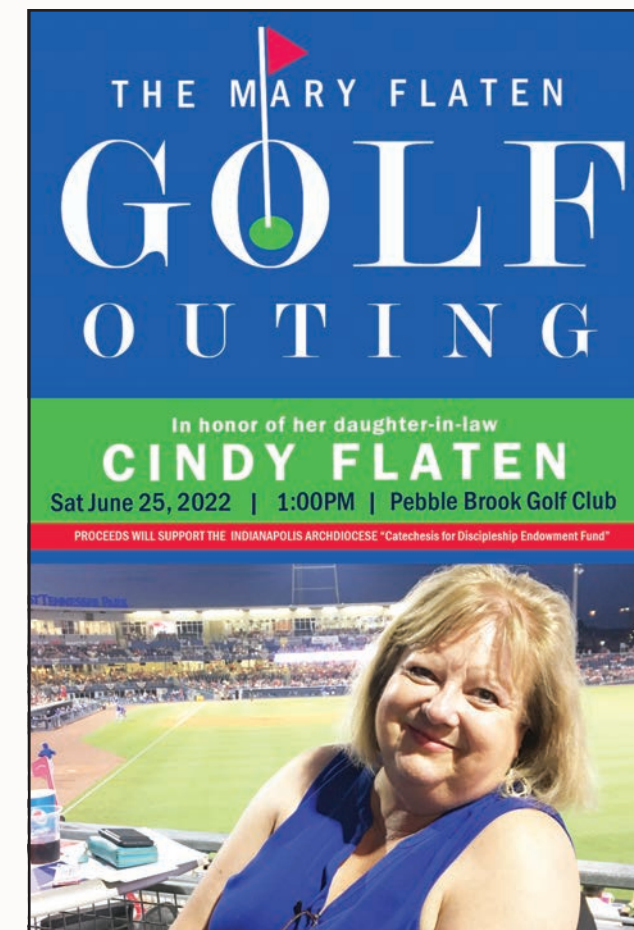
So, the members of Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood have been contributing to the Catechesis for Discipleship Endowment Fund for about five years, knowing the impact the conference will have on parish catechetical leaders from across the archdiocese.

"It's going to make them even more enthusiastic to teach the faith," Paul says. "It makes you enthusiastic to go to eucharistic adoration, to receive Communion, to learn the faith, to share the faith."

Beyond the conference, the endowment helps to support the overall goal of the archdiocese's Office of Catechesis.

"What I see coming out of this is stronger Catholic teaching, that people coming out of this will have the courage to say this is the truth and to share the truth," Clara says. "It does a lot of good in getting God's word out there. We need that."

Married for 37 years, the couple view the endowment



A flyer advertised a June golf tournament in honor of Cindy Flaten with proceeds going to the archdiocese's Catechesis for Discipleship Endowment Fund. (Submitted photo)

as a way to help people reach the ultimate goal that God has for everyone.

"Our goal is heaven," Clara says. "We do a lot of praying for ourselves and others. Hopefully, we're leading a life where we're not only growing in holiness, we're helping others to do that. The most important thing in my life is to do reparation for my sins and to help other people get to heaven."

It's a goal that Cindy Flaten worked toward, too, for others and for herself, says her husband Tom. He believes she's already there.

"I know she's my angel in heaven now."

(To contribute to the Catechesis for Discipleship Endowment Fund, send a check made payable to Catholic Community Foundation (CCF), noting in the memo line, **Catechesis for Discipleship Endowment Fund #285-0287**. Mail to CCF, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Suite 105, Indianapolis, IN 46202. Or give securely online at: <https://secure.acceptiva.com/?cst=z7vWoz>) †

Document helps parishes prepare for Year 2 of National Eucharistic Revival

By Natalie Hoefler

Year one of the three-year National Eucharistic Revival is underway.

But even as year one's focus of eucharistic revival at the diocesan level has just begun, the archdiocese has already created a tool to help faith communities prepare for the revival's parish focus during year two, which starts on June 1 next year and goes through mid-July of 2024.

The resource is a document called "10 Ways Parishes Can Enter Year 1 of the 3-Year National Eucharistic Revival." (See accompanying article on this page.)

"We're using the phrase 'year one' because the document is about activities parishes can engage in during year one of the revival to help them prepare for year two and beyond," says Ken Ogorek, archdiocesan director of catechesis.

"Parishes needn't have a fully developed plan at this point," he adds. "But using the ideas in the document can help them prepare now so they can hit the ground running come June next year."

Some ideas listed include praying,

listening, taking an inventory of current parish activities, conducting a survey



Ken Ogorek

for ideas from parishioners and more.

Ogorek says the archdiocesan Eucharistic Revival Planning Team collaborated on the resource. He calls the team "a small group of people in various ministries throughout

central and southern Indiana—mostly outside the Catholic Center in Indianapolis."

Jeff McQueen is on the team. The member of St. Susanna Parish in Plainfield serves as parish council chair and with other groups in the parish.

"I think the suggestions [in the '10 Ways' document] are all wonderful for the purpose of assisting the parish as the Church's greatest missionary tool for evangelization," he says.

McQueen has great hopes for the revival's year two focus at the parish level and for the National Eucharistic Revival in general.

"It is my hope that many new missionary disciples and disciple-makers

may be developed by the renewal of the importance of the Eucharist in our lives," he says. "My hope is that the Eucharistic Revival will foster transformation of parish members and bring them to a deeper relationship with Jesus through a clearer understanding of the Eucharist."



Jeff McQueen

Father Dustin Boehm, pastor of St. Gabriel Parish in Connorsville and St. Bridget of Ireland Parish in Liberty, is also on the archdiocese's planning team for the revival.

"I think it's a great thing that we are going to have parishes focus on the Eucharist for a whole year in the revival," he says. "The document is about looking, listening and discerning opportunities for how to do that next year."



Fr. Dustin Boehm

participating in the revival by praying the archdiocese's "Prayer for Eucharistic Revival" (eucharisticrevivalindy.org/prayer) at the end of each Mass.

The parishes' existing annual "31 Days of Perpetual Adoration" initiative is one example of an effort faith communities can start preparing for to engage parishioners with the Eucharist in year two of the revival.

"We also upped eucharistic adoration opportunities throughout the rest of the year," says Father Boehm. "A lot of my homilies are on the Eucharist. [The efforts is] about trying to become more aware of fruits of the Eucharist. There's been a good spirit and ever-elevating awareness of the gift of the Eucharist from this focus."

Yadira Villatoro, administrator of religious education at St. Anthony Parish in Indianapolis and archdiocesan Eucharistic Revival Planning Team member, says discussions have taken place at her parish regarding plans for year two of the revival.

"We want to include adoration during the confirmation retreat for teens to make them aware of how beautiful it is to have Jesus right there in the Eucharist," she says. "Sometimes they think nobody is in the tabernacle. I hope spending time with Jesus in adoration will give them more reverence."

Villatoro says the faith community will also encourage more people to participate in the parish's adoration hours and to visit the chapel in the parish center more frequently, "even for just 10-15 minutes."

She offers one parish practice for other faith communities to consider planning for year two of the revival.

"We're a multi-cultural parish," says Villatoro. "So, every year in June we come together for a special eucharistic procession on the feast of *Corpus Christi*. We have people from all the different countries bring their country's flag to show we're all united in Christ."



Yadira Villatoro

That oneness in Christ is a fruit Father Boehm hopes to see come from the National Eucharistic Revival in general.

"We're so far apart sometimes," he says. "We live in a time when political, racial, cultural, social and economic differences seem to be dividing us into camps or tribes. This revival will only help alleviate that."

"It's the Lord's great prayer that 'they may be one' (Jn 17:11). This focus on the Eucharist will help battle that in our parishes, communities, archdiocese and beyond."

(For more information on the National Eucharistic Revival in the archdiocese, go to eucharisticrevivalindy.org/resources-for-parishes.) †

10 Ways Parishes Can Enter Year 1 of the 3-Year National Eucharistic Revival

June 2022 marked the beginning of a 3-year period on intense focus on encountering Jesus in the Eucharist. When the parish phase starts in June 2023, parishes who follow the steps listed below will be well-positioned to capitalize on this opportunity to deepen faith in neighborhoods, communities and families throughout the archdiocese.

Pray

Parish leaders can start praying daily that the Eucharistic Revival bears good fruit by God's grace and mercy.

Listen

At least one person, appointed by the pastor or parish life coordinator, can monitor the main sources of information about the Revival at national and Archdiocesan levels. (A good example is to sign up for the e-newsletter at www.eucharisticrevival.org.)

Inventory

Take stock of all activities currently occurring in the parish—practices that focus on encountering Jesus in the Eucharist. Note especially any gaps in groups served or ministries currently lacking a strong, eucharistic component.

Ask for Prayer

Invite parishioners to pray for an increase in devotion to the Eucharist among all parish members. Initiate or enhance opportunities for parishioners to spend time praying with our Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament.

Learn

All parish leaders could read and discuss *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church* and/or access the free mini-course on this document via the Revival website: www.eucharisticrevival.org/about/#resources.

Incorporate

Each parish meeting could start with a brief agenda item encouraging reflection and discussion on a short passage from Sacred Scripture or Sacred Tradition—a passage referencing the Eucharist.

Encourage Penance

Additional opportunities to celebrate the sacrament of penance could be made available as needed. Confessors could help penitents appreciate more deeply the connections between this sacrament and the Eucharist.

Ask

Conversations among leaders in clusters, cohorts, deaneries and regions of the archdiocese could accelerate the sharing of best practices regarding Eucharistic devotion as well as connecting the Eucharist to mission and service.

Survey

Parishioners could be asked for ideas on how their faith community could highlight the encounter with Jesus unique to the Eucharist.

Pray

Sustained prayer throughout Year 1 of this revival will help each parish discern how best to live out the potential of this initiative, especially starting in June 2023 (Year 2).

For updates on the National Eucharistic Revival, go to www.eucharisticrevivalindy.org.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe and Blessed Carlo Acutis pray for us! †

SEMINARIANS

continued from page 9

It also gave him a perspective on some foundational aspects of the priesthood, such as how priests serve as spiritual fathers for the people they serve.

“That title ‘father’ is not just an empty title,” Hansen said. “It’s a dignity and duty.”

Preparing children for the sacrament of penance and for their first Communion gave Hansen concrete experiences of the formative role that priests can play in the lives of people of all ages.

“You have the ability to guide them,” he said. “You can influence them and have the power to lead them in faith in a way that I was led when I was young. That’s why I started discerning a priestly call in the first place. I wanted to give back the faith that I was given.”

Father Syberg noted that parish ministry assignments can also give seminarians personal experience of the challenges of serving in parishes and of how it is ultimately God that is guiding their ministry.

“Sometimes the fruits of ministry aren’t readily apparent,” he said. “Even after you grind your way through it, you might wonder if you’re really doing anything or getting through. But that’s part of ministry. It’s part of any vocation.

“Sometimes the pastoral ministry that we want to do isn’t what the Holy Spirit is asking us to do right now, even if what we want to do is a good, holy thing. But the Holy Spirit may want you to do something else.”

Many Bishop Bruté seminarians have had the chance to experience the ups and downs of parish catechetical ministry at St. Monica, which is not far from the college seminary. They began serving there in 2014, and last year there were 10 seminarians assigned to the parish.

Mary Jo Thomas Day, St. Monica’s longtime director of religious education, has been the seminarians’ ministry supervisor since they began.

“They have been a wonderful inspiration,” she said.

“I always look for catechists that have a strong faith foundation and who understand the Catholic faith, and they’re role models of faith. They come in on Sundays with their books in their hands and ready to teach.”

Thomas Day also emphasized how the seminarians’ presence at St. Monica is a benefit for the parish.

“When I tell the parents that their children will be taught by a seminarian, they just light up,” she said. “They’re just such a good example for them. It’s also positive for our catechists to be with them and see their faith and their knowledge of the faith.”

Not ‘just a hoop to jump through’

Like St. Monica, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany has had many seminarians through the years assist in ministry there, especially in its catechetical programs.

They come to the New Albany Deanery faith community from Saint Meinrad and are usually approaching the end of their priestly formation.

In fact, the last seminarian to serve at Our Lady of Perpetual Help was Father Matthew Perronie, who was ordained a priest for the archdiocese on June 4. He now serves as parochial vicar of St. Monica Parish.

While still in seminary, Father Perronie served at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in the summer of 2021 and then during the following fall, winter and spring.

COVID-19 had greatly limited Father Perronie’s pastoral formation opportunities while at Saint Meinrad. So, when he finally got to minister in person at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, he said he took advantage of every chance at ministry he found, often going beyond what Saint Meinrad’s pastoral ministry program required of him.

“On the weekends I was there, I looked for every opportunity that was there,” he said. “I’d often stay for confirmation preparation. If there was a youth group meeting in the evening, I’d stay for that.”

Early in the summer of 2021 at the parish when ministry programs weren’t active, Father Perronie, then

a newly-ordained transitional deacon, offered to visit families to bless their homes.

“Longing to get to know people, I thought about ways to do that without flat out inviting myself over to their house,” said Father Perronie with a laugh.

“He inspired us as a staff and a parish to model his presence,” said Evonne Corrales, director of youth and childhood ministries at Our Lady of Perpetual Help. “He inspired me just in the way he evangelized. That’s what we need in our parishes. We need intentional conversations and the intentional presence he had here.”

Taking unexpected opportunities to evangelize and catechize was something that Father Perronie experienced and learned while serving at Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Before the start of a class to help children prepare for their first confession and first Communion, Father Perronie needed some holy water. A student whom he knew was always eager to help was there with him.

“So, I said, ‘Come and follow me. We’re going to see how holy water is made,’” Father Perronie recalled. “It sparked his attention and got him excited. I ended up using it as a lesson for the whole class.

“And I kind of let the student take charge. I asked him about what we did, and he responded. It was a teaching opportunity for him.”

Father Joseph Feltz, Our Lady of Perpetual Help’s pastor and one of Father Perronie’s ministry supervisors, appreciated his now-brother priest’s presence in his faith community.

“Being a part of Saint Meinrad’s pastoral ministry program has been good,” he said. “But Father Matthew kind of took it up a level.

“A pastoral ministry assignment isn’t just a hoop to jump through. It’s truly part of formation. From his standpoint, he got so much out of it. But then he gave so much as well.”

(For more information on a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit HearGodsCall.com.) †

CATECHISTS

continued from page 1

and adults change as culture and technology evolve,” he added.

“We’ve tried really hard to reach out to families. We’ve done some different family gatherings around Advent and Lent and sacramental prep. It’s not just about passing the faith on to children—it’s about forming the family together.”

The same is true for Deacon John’s own family. His daughter, Stephanie Willis, serves as DRE and youth minister for St. John the Baptist Parish in Starlight and St. Mary Parish in Lanesville.

“She was 2 years old when I started as DRE,” he said. “She went to all the youth events I led.

“Now we talk shop. We show up at the same meetings sometimes. It’s fun being able to share that.”

And now that Willis has a 2-year-old son, Jacobi tells her she has to take him to all the events “so we can get three generations of catechists going!”

Recalling his more than three decades in ministry, Deacon John feels blessed.

“I just think of how blessed I am that I get to walk with people on their faith journey, and how God allows us [catechists] to enter into their lives in good times and sometimes not so good times—even if it’s just a small part—being able to share the faith.

“And my own faith just continues to grow along with those I teach. I think there’s a lot of blessing in that as well.”

‘I want them to know everything’

Like Deacon Jacobi, Maurica Clouser holds more than one position at more than one parish. For one, she serves as secretary for her home parish, St. Jude the Apostle in Spencer and for St. John the Apostle Parish in Bloomington.

Clouser has also served as administrator of religious education (ARE) at St. Jude the Apostle since 1993. And last year, she began teaching religious education for first- and second-grade youths—including sacramental preparation for first Communion—at St. John the Apostle.

This newest role is almost identical to Clouser’s first experience as a catechist.

It was 1989, and her home parish needed a catechist for children in first through third grade.

“At first, I resisted,” she admitted. “I was approached the year before but was pregnant with my second child and already had a baby.”



Maurica Clouser

Add in frequent trips to visit her family in Louisville, and “I just thought it would be too much,” said Clouser.

But she also understood the importance of preparing children to receive their first Communion, so she agreed to volunteer.

“If you know me, then you know it’s all about the sacraments and especially first Communion,” she said. “Having the opportunity to teach about the Blessed Sacrament is a blessing.”

When Clouser became ARE for St. Jude the Apostle in 1993, her first task was taking a group to World Youth Day, held that year in Denver.

“Even though we were a small parish, we had a fairly large group go,” she said. “That experience still inspires me. St. John Paul II had such zeal for the faith. ... I attempt to have that same zeal, at least a small part of it, when I teach.”

Clouser structures her religious education classes by teaching all of the students first before they are separated into groups by grade.

“I am a natural teacher and love to teach,” said Clouser. “Sometimes I get on a roll, and I have to apologize to the other catechists for stealing the entire class time.

“I can’t really help myself—I want them to know everything there is to know about the Lord. My most enjoyable moments are when I see a certain look of understanding or enthusiasm in the students’ eyes.”

She called her first year instructing at St. John the Apostle “memorable.”

“The highlight besides first Communion was having weekly adoration during religious education,” Clouser said. “I was able to take my students into church for the last 10-15

minutes and let them get to know the Lord in a most special way, and even lead prayers before the Benediction.”

There are some challenges, Clouser acknowledged. She still makes frequent trips to Louisville, sometimes driving “late at night or very early the next morning to make it to class.”

Some years, there have only been a few students to instruct—“but those few are worth it,” she added.

Clouser said the biggest struggle is when catechesis is not reinforced at home.

“That is when I count on the Holy Spirit to bring the child’s spark back,” she said. “I just hope and pray that I have helped Christ along the way.”

‘Love and meet people where they are’

Stephanie Whitley admits that she wasn’t always active in the Church.



Stephanie Whitley

But as she matured in faith, she “had the burning desire to learn more,” said Whitley. “It was the love of the faith that made me want to actually share that [faith].”

And it was seeing the domino effect of a time of poor catechesis within the Church that made Whitley “passionate about teaching the faith to young ones and trying to flip that around.”

To make that change, Whitley volunteered as a Sunday school teacher about 30 years ago at her parish, Holy Angels in Indianapolis. Soon she was also leading Bible studies for the parish’s youth ministry.

In 2001, Whitley joined the staff at Holy Angels as director of religious education.

“I oversee everything related to faith formation—teaching sacramental preparation and children’s [kindergarten through eighth grade] religious education, faith formation in youth ministry, coordinating RCIA,” she said.

When Whitley began her role as DRE and started preparing high school youths for confirmation, she saw another way to “flip” the effectiveness of catechesis.

“We changed the six-month formation period to a year and included a mission

trip out of state for a week, serving hands-on in communities, showing the love of Christ through the works that [the youths] did. They were finding it was more powerful to show their faith by what they did for the marginalized.

“These young people started coming back to church after confirmation, where before they said, ‘Confirmation is done, I’m done.’ They were finding they had a responsibility through their sacrament to give and to be a part of the one body of Christ. It’s just been beautiful to see.”

Whitley still enjoys teaching the faith to young children. And she enjoys learning from them as well.

“We adults have our logic and reason, but children are very basic,” she explained. “When I hear them talk about Gospel readings, they bring it to the basic core of what it means with no fluff.”

After three decades as a catechist, Whitley still enjoys “planting the seed of faith.”

“The beauty of it is when I see the a-ha moments of not only children but adults, when they say, ‘I never knew that’ or ‘I never thought of it that way,’” she said. “Then their eyes open to things in their lives where they can say, ‘That’s where God was present’ or ‘I see now it was faith that got me through that situation.’ It’s just planting those seeds.”

Whitley said she has learned that sometimes a catechist “is blessed to see those seeds germinate and grow.” But not always—and that’s OK.

“Our job is to plant and water,” she explained. “How that seed grows is God’s responsibility.”

Catechesis takes patience, Whitley acknowledged.

“Sometimes we’re very impatient when we give instruction and share the faith and don’t see those a-ha moments. Be patient,” she advised. “Because the key to catechesis is to love and meet people where they are. Don’t pull them or push them, but walk with them, accompany them.”

Such love, patience and accompaniment make catechesis far more effective than “throwing out just book-learning,” said Whitley.

“It’s that love of the faith that helps you and helps them walk through the faith and get that faith we’re all longing for.” †