

Deacon Marty Eisert Remarks
Fall 2018 Vicariate meetings
Faith Formation Implementation

Bishop Persico launched the pastoral planning process four years ago. It included five initiatives. Three already have been successfully launched and are continuing to achieve the desired results. They include:

- 1) revitalizing our Catholic education system
- 2) restructuring and revitalizing our parishes and
- 3) ramping up our efforts to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

In many ways, these three efforts pave the way for the presentation this evening, of the fourth initiative, namely faith formation. The fifth aspect of pastoral planning, organizational restructuring, has been happening organically as we've moved through each of the others.

Michele Smith, a religious education leader from St. Callistus in Kane, will speak to the six recommendations delivered by the Faith Formation Task Force — led so capably by Sister Phyllis Schleicher — and how those six recommendations will be implemented through the four areas or ways in which we encounter our faith.

My portion of this evening's presentation is to underscore the critical importance of the faith formation initiative. In essence, faith formation is the "make it or break it" effort of the pastoral planning process.

Expressed otherwise, if we don't do this initiative right, then all we have done up to this point in time was to buy a little time through Catholic school and parish restructuring.

As we focus on faith formation, we need to ensure that our own zeal for the Lord is increased — so much so, that it will naturally spill into our communities and down through the next generations. And isn't that what we want? For others to know the love and joy we experience through our relationship with Christ.

Faith formation is not about bringing another program into our diocese. Our diocese has done so in the past and with good results. But when a program comes to an end, the momentum naturally dissipates.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, this faith formation initiative calls for a fundamental change in how we are formed in our Catholic faith and especially in how we live that faith.

The change cannot take place just in our mind, but must take root in our hearts, where the essence of who we are resides.

Allow me to ever so briefly explain. We have come to compartmentalize religion as we have likewise come to compartmentalize many other aspects of our life such as our political beliefs or the wide range of societal beliefs.

One contemporary theologian points out that, in St. Paul's day, belief in God provided the fundamental framework for how the Jewish people lived their lives: how and what they thought; how they made their decisions; how they conducted themselves in their jobs, their relationship with family, friends and neighbors. In other words, they lived out every aspect — large and small — of their lives according to their belief in God.

By comparison, living out our faith cannot be limited to attending Sunday Mass. We run the risk of making faith incidental to our lives.

Of late, we have begun to hear the term “intentional disciples.” Intentional means that we follow Jesus and all that implies, on purpose; that we’re being deliberate, studied, willful in our effort to know, love and serve him.

St. Paul often speaks about the importance of having zeal. The dictionary definition of zeal is to have “great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or objective.” Zeal embodies passion, ardor, fervor, devotion, vigor.

Becoming intentional disciples filled with zeal for the Lord and the Gospel message is a lifelong commitment to knowing, understanding and living our faith. This captures the challenge placed before us this evening by the faith formation initiative. This challenge is formidable. And it won’t be met overnight.

Rather, becoming intentional disciples is a lifelong effort. It ends only when we draw our last breath. Tonight, we take another important step on that lifelong journey.

It is now my pleasure to introduce Michele Smith, a religious education leader at St. Callistus Parish in Kane, and a member of the Faith Formation Implementation Team.