



"People of every stage of life are called to deeper and more intentional ways to lead others into a more mature faith in Jesus Christ..."

The most common theme among those participating in the synodal process was lifelong faith formation. This result, while not very surprising, should challenge diocesan and parish leadership to enhance our efforts at transformational formation opportunities for people of all ages. Our Church has a rich treasury of faith and practice to offer those who are already members of the church and all those who are seeking a closer relationship with God. We offer Jesus Christ himself within the living tradition of the Church.

Jesus' commissioning in Matthew's Gospel sets the stage for our mission. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt. 28:19-20) At the center of lifelong faith formation is an encounter with Christ. People of every stage of life are called to deeper and more intentional ways to lead others into a more mature faith in Jesus Christ, from the preschooler to the senior citizen. Our local synodal process has asked participants and leaders to consider "all believers to be active participants in the catechetical initiative, not passive consumers or recipients of a service." (Directory for Catechesis, 4)

Lifelong formation is person-centered and leads to deeper engagement in the life of the Church and in one's community, including social transformation in the light of the Gospel. It recognizes that there will be stages in life where it may be more or less appropriate to focus on a particular dimension of faith formation. (For instance, the kind of formation offered to second graders making their first communion will look different than that of adults coming into the Church at the Easter Vigil.) The ministries and mission of our church at the diocesan and parish level should consider all aspects that form one's faith as missionary disciples, such as liturgy, catechesis, evangelization, stewardship, life and justice ministries, sacramental preparation, Catholic schools, adult faith formation, pastoral care and outreach, family, youth and young adult ministries.

A shared and common mission to “go out and make disciples” compels us to focus our efforts to become ever more responsive to the needs of our local communities. Parishes are invited to consider how they are engaging all of their households to have, live and share faith in the world at all times. In other words, our faith should permeate every aspect of our lives. Therefore, our parish communities should be an oasis for belonging, prayer, worship, service, evangelization, and ongoing formation.

The opportunities for continued renewal may be found in calling forth the gifts within our communities including the invitation of leaders of every generation. Lifelong faith formation is embodied in parishes that move from a solely child-centered catechetical approach to involving the entire parish. Recent expanded catechetical models include intergenerational events and family-centered learning as options to include children and young people with adults, all growing together. In doing so, a viable response would be to build lifelong and seamless formation with and for every generation. Addressing the desire of younger generations to be closer to their parents and their grandparents may provide healthy opportunities for our faith story to pass from one generation to another. The more opportunities we provide younger Catholics to connect and share faith with adult Catholic disciples, the more their desire to continue to grow in faith will remain strong well into adulthood.

“Every one of the baptized, called to the maturity of faith, has the right to adequate catechesis. It is therefore the Church’s task to respond to this in a satisfactory manner.” (Directory for Catechesis, 224) Parish communities may be asked to respond creatively and collaborate more regionally. Our task is to communicate in authentic and hospitable ways to the individuals with whom we are looking to share the Good News. Our call is to build better ways to communicate in our diocesan and local parish communities the variety of opportunities that already exist while enhancing adult faith formation and ministry with young people. I am excited by our diocese’s next steps to serve the Lord and our neighbor with joy.

*Gregory Coogan, Secretary for Catechetical
Formation for the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland*

