



Lifelong Faith Formation for All Generations

John Roberto

... the main task of handing on the faith is the whole community's task, carried out as members of the community gather together to sustain each other, go out and witness to, and even work to transform (when appropriate) the world in the name of Jesus, the Christ. (Terrence Tilley)

Over the past decade I have been engaged in developing an approach to congregational faith formation that is lifelong, ecclesial, and intergenerational. The theoretical foundations for this approach has been evolving since the early 1970s. The work of religious educators C. Ellis Nelson, John Westerhoff, Charles Foster, Berard Marthaler, Francois D'Arcy Berube, Christianne Brusselmans, Maria Harris, and Catherine Dooley have provided a solid foundation upon which to build an approach to lifelong faith formation.

John Roberto is the editor of *Lifelong Faith* and president of LifelongFaith Associates. He works as a consultant to churches and national organizations, teaches courses in lifelong faith formation, conducts workshops across the U.S., writes and conducts research on lifelong faith formation. His latest publications include *Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners* (Twenty-Third Publications) and four volumes of intergenerational learning programs in the *People of Faith* series from Harcourt Religion Publishers. He was the founder of the Center for Ministry Development and the creator of the Generations of Faith Project.

This emerging vision of lifelong ecclesial faith formation has several defining characteristics:

- To utilize the whole life of the church as the faith formation curriculum through church year feasts and seasons, sacraments and liturgy, justice and service, prayer and spirituality, and community life.
- To engage all generations in more active participation in church life, especially Sunday worship.
- To develop an events-centered core curriculum for all generations in the church community, while offering age-appropriate programming to address specific life cycle learning needs.
- To involve all of the generations in learning the core curriculum together through intergenerational learning.
- To equip and support families, and especially parents, to practice the Christian way of life at home and in their daily lives.
- To transform the church community into a community of lifelong learners.

Maria Harris in *Fashion Me A People* captures the heart of an ecclesial model of faith formation when she writes,

... we can conclude that fuller and more extensive curriculum is already present in the church's life: in teaching, worship, community, proclamation, and outreach. Printed resources that serve this wider curriculum are in the treasury of the church, especially the comprehensive curricular materials designed over the last century in the United States. These, however, are not *the* curriculum. *The* curriculum is both more basic and more profound. It is *the entire course of the church's life*, found in the fundamental forms of that life. It is the priestly, prophetic, and political work of *didache*, *leiturgia*, *koinonia*, *kerygma*, and *diakonia*. Where education is the fashioning and refashioning of these forms in interplay, curriculum is the subject matter and processes that make them to be what they are. Where education is the living and the fashioning, curriculum is the life, the substance that is fashioned. (Harris, 63-65)

Faith formation is a **comprehensive** and **integrated** process that is much more than simply instruction. It incorporates 1) formation through participation in the life of the faith community, 2) education in Scripture and the Christian tradition, 3) apprenticeship in the Christian life, 4) knowledge of and intimate connection with liturgy and rituals, 5) development of a life of prayer, 6) moral formation in Jesus Christ, and 7) engagement in actions of justice and service.

This vision is brought to life through four essential practices:

1. an events-centered curriculum for all ages in the church community
2. an events-centered intergenerational learning process that incorporates preparation for an event, experience of the event, and application of its meaning in daily living
3. household faith formation involving learning, celebrating rituals, praying, and serving
4. collaborative, empowering, team-based leadership

This vision and four practices form the basis of the Generations of Faith approach to faith formation that my colleagues and I developed at the Center for Ministry Development. This essay briefly summarizes the vision and practices of this ecclesial, intergenerational approach to lifelong faith formation. I have written about this approach more extensively in *Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners* (Twenty-Third Publications, 2006).

Practice I. An Events-Centered Curriculum for All Generations

This ecclesial approach is centered in the events of church life. The Christian community is the primary communicator of the tradition and practices of the Christian faith through its corporate life. At the heart of faith formation is the forming and transforming power of the Christian community. Charles Foster (*Educating Congregations*, 1994) proposed an understanding of the faith community as the primary educator and that the events of church life served as the foundation for a curriculum. For Foster the life of the church is centered in events that have the power to educate and transform individuals and the community. He writes,

If these events are to become important to people, they must be familiar with them. If we want people to participate in these events and be transformed by them, we must help people understand these events and learn how to participate in them. Over time people begin to identify with the events and take on their character. ... We discover ourselves in a community of people identified with that event. We begin to see the world through the perspective of the community originating in and shaped by that event. ... These events not only tell us who we are, but also to whom we belong. They provide us with clues about how we are to

relate to others and to participate in the world around us. (Foster, 38)

Foster identifies four kinds of events in the life of the. These events become the basis of a lifelong curriculum.

- **Paradigmatic Events.** The patterns for Christian life and community have their origin in significant events deeply rooted in our tradition. The central paradigmatic event or pattern is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the paschal mystery. This event establishes the framework for the Church Year and the liturgical life of the parish. Paradigmatic events provide a persistent structure that gives order and purpose to our common lives.
- **Seasonal Events.** Our participation in the narrative structure of paradigmatic events occurs through a series of *seasonal events* that gather us up into repeated activities of telling and retelling, interpreting and re-interpreting, embodying and reenacting the stories associated with them. The Church year feasts and seasons help to provide a rhythmic pattern for the life of the parish. The ritual processes that structure these events carry the church through the liturgical seasons from Advent through Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, through the calendar of saints' days, and through local seasons and ethnic traditions. Whether liturgical or nonliturgical, seasonal events order and move the life of the community through the year. Everyone participates; everyone benefits. These events provide the clearest and most consistent structure for the education of a parish community.
- **Occasional Events.** Occasional events intensify community identity and mission, illuminate community meanings, and energize community life. These events, such as the celebration of a baptism, a wedding, a funeral, a church dedication, or a special mission project, provide other occasions for telling other kinds of stories integral to the paradigmatic gospel story that gives the parish its reason for being. These events include the celebration of the sacraments (Eucharist, Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation, Marriage, Anointing of the Sick, Ordination), funerals, commissionings, birthdays, and anniversaries. They also include actions of justice and service and community life events. The participation of people in these events is heightened and the

significance of these events is enhanced when people prepare to participate in them.

- **Spontaneous Events.** These events surprise the faith community with unexpected opportunities to rehearse and renew its participation in the meanings of ancient events and their stories. These events bring joy and sorrow, blessing and suffering. Spontaneous events come in many forms—a changing population in the church or neighborhood, the loss of a pastor, the destruction of the church building by fire, the construction of a church building, among a myriad number of other possibilities.

Application: Core Curriculum

The events of the Christian community—church year feasts and seasons, sacraments and liturgy, justice and service, prayer and spiritual traditions, and community activities—are the **core** curriculum for the entire community, all ages and generations. In the words of Maria Harris, “The church does not have an educational program; it is an educational program.”

Churches fashion a **core** faith formation curriculum which systematically and comprehensively presents the Christian faith through the events of church life. The goal is to develop a common curriculum which immerses *everyone* more deeply into the Christian faith and into the lived experience of the Christian community. One approach that Catholic parishes utilize is to organize the events of church life into a six year curriculum incorporating 1) church year feasts and seasons, 2) creed, 3) sacraments, 4) morality, 5) justice and service, and 6) prayer. (This reflects the major themes of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.) Other churches utilize Sunday worship and the three year cycle of lectionary readings as the core curriculum.

The six curriculum themes and their events form a spiral curriculum that immerses people more deeply each year into the Christian faith. This provides foundational catechesis that is continuous throughout life—all six themes are offered on a six year cycle, and the cycle continues to repeat through life. The fundamental unity of the church is strengthened by establishing a core curriculum for all members of the community.

The events-centered core curriculum is designed for the whole Christian community, supplemented by age-specific programs for children, teens, and adults. For example, churches offer monthly intergenerational learning sessions on the core

curriculum for the whole faith community, and then throughout the month they offer age-specific programming for a variety groups. They may offer the same intergenerational program several times each month to accommodate the number of people in the church, using different days and times to make it easy for people to participate.

Curriculum Examples

Here is an example of a one-year curriculum that explores “Jesus and Discipleship” through church year feasts and seasons. This example makes clear the intimate connection between learning, Sunday worship (with a special focus on the lectionary), and the liturgical seasons.

Jesus and Discipleship Curriculum Example

Advent-Christmas	Birth of the Messiah
January-February	Called to Discipleship (Lectionary Readings)
Lent	Living as Disciples: Praying, Fasting, Almsgiving
Holy Week	Death of Jesus
Easter Season	Resurrection of Jesus
Pentecost	Sent Forth on Mission
Summer & Fall	Growing as Disciples (Lectionary Readings)

Justice issues, events, and action projects provide opportunities to engage the whole community in the work of justice and service, as well as learn about the biblical teachings on justice. For example, churches can prepare the community for a justice and service project, such as helping to feed and clothe the poor in a community, with an intergenerational program on poverty and the needs of the poor; or celebrate the national holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr., by conducting an intergenerational program on racial equality or peace and nonviolence, and then engage everyone in an action project; or enlist the whole community in supporting the work of national and international organizations by adopting an organizations’ project, such as building homes through Habitat for Humanity, and then conducting an intergenerational program on housing and poverty.

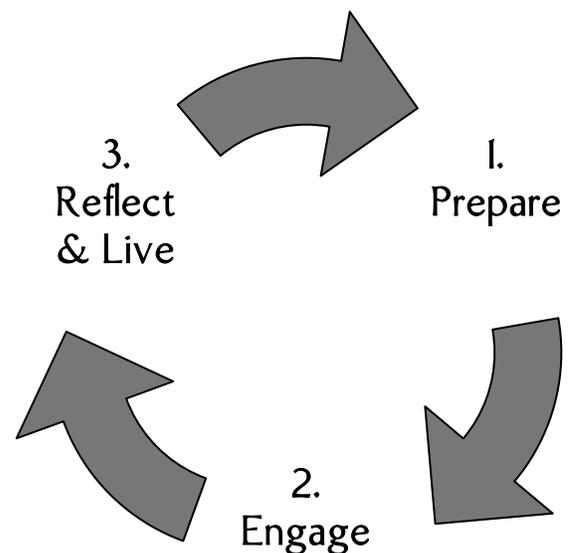
Here is an example of a one-year curriculum that explores “Acting for Justice” through Sunday worship and the lectionary readings, church year feasts and seasons, and local and global justice events and service projects. Each event leads to an action project.

Justice and Service Curriculum Example

Advent-Christmas	Being a Peacemaker (“The Prince of Peace”)
M.L. King Jr.	Respecting Human Dignity —Confronting Racism
Lent-Almsgiving	Serving the Poor and Vulnerable
Earth Day	Caring for God’s Creation
Pentecost	Being in Solidarity with People around the World
Labor Day	Protecting the Rights of Workers
World Hunger Day	Feeding the Hungry
Election Day	Justice for All
Human Rights Day	Human Rights and Responsibilities

Practice 2. Events-Centered Intergenerational Learning

The learning process for events-centered faith formation involves: 1) *preparing* people of all ages to participate meaningfully and actively in the church event that is the focus of the curriculum through intergenerational learning; 2) *engaging* people in the event—Sunday worship, sacraments, church year feasts and seasons, justice and service projects, prayer and spiritual traditions, and/or community activities—so that they can be formed and transformed by their participation; and 3) guiding people in *reflecting* on the significance and meaning of their learning and participating, and *empowering* them to *live* their faith at home and in the world.



Application: Intergenerational Learning

The key to educating the whole community is intergenerational learning—bringing all ages and generations together to learn with and from each other. The intergenerational learning model integrates learning, building community, sharing faith, praying, celebrating, and practicing. It is for all members of the community—young and old, single and married, families with children and empty-nest families. It involves the whole family in learning together. It equips individuals and families with the knowledge, skills, and faith-sharing activities for learning and practicing faith at home.

Building on the work of a number of authors, especially James White (*Intergenerational Religious Education*, 1988), my colleagues at the Center for Ministry Development (Mariette Martineau, Leif Kehrwald, and Joan Weber) and I developed a model of intergenerational learning based on White's four patterns, which is being used by Catholic parishes in the Generations of Faith Project and in the intergenerational sessions for the *People of Faith* series (Harcourt Religion). (See the new book *Intergenerational Faith Formation* in the Resources section.)

In this model intergenerational learning is designed around a four movement learning process.

Welcome, Community Building and Opening Prayer

1. An **All-Ages Learning Experience** for the whole assembly that introduces the theme or topic for the program.
2. **In-Depth Learning Experiences** that probe the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) *or* for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and conducted in one of three formats:
 - *Whole Group Format*: learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room (age-specific or all ages small groups);
 - *Age Group Format*: learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages;
 - *Learning Activity Center Format*: learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers (age-specific and/or all ages learning centers).
3. An **All-Ages Contributive Learning Experience** in which each generation teaches the other generations.

4. **Reflection** on the learning experience and interactive group sharing and preparation for applying their learning to daily life using the household resources.

Closing prayer

Example: Justice and Solidarity

All Ages Learning Experience

1. Activity 1. Where Are You From?—tracing each individual or family journey to the U.S.
2. Activity 2. If the World Were a Village of 100 People

In-Depth Learning Experience: Age Group Format

1. Activity 1. How Are We Connected to People around the World?
 - Family Activity: What's Inside Your House? (from around the world)
 - Adolescent and Adult Activity: What's in Your Life? (from around the world)
2. Activity 2. The Journey of Interdependence
 - Option 1. The Journey of the Chocolate Bar (all ages)
 - Option 2. The Journey of the Banana (all ages)
 - Option 3. The Journey of Coffee (teens or adults)
3. Activity 3—Presentation: Solidarity through Fair Trade
4. Activity 4. What do the Scriptures and Church Teachings Say about Solidarity?
 - Activity: The Good Samaritan for Today
 - Activity: Who Do We Need to Be in Solidarity With?
5. Activity 5. How Can We Build Solidarity among People?—Developing Action Projects

All Ages Contributive Learning Reflection and Application

(For the complete learning design see *Acting for Justice* by John Roberto, Harcourt Religion, 2005.)

Practice 3: Household Faith Formation

An integral element of events-centered faith formation is equipping households to integrate the Christian faith and values into the fabric of home life, learn the Scriptures and the Christian tradition, pray together and celebrate rituals as part of the pattern of daily and seasonal home life, care for each other and those in their community, and work for justice and serve those in need locally and globally.

The congregation takes the initiative in nurturing the faith of families/households and empowering them to live their faith at home and in the world through four strategies.

1. *Intergenerational Learning*: By participating in intergenerational learning, families have a shared experience of learning together, sharing faith, praying together, and celebrating rituals and traditions and are equipped to share faith at home. This is a great opportunity to model and demonstrate faith practices that families can live at home.
2. *Household Faith Practice*: Through home activities developed specifically for the event, individuals and families are given resources that assist them to live their faith at home.
3. *Participation in Church Life*: By participating in Sunday worship and the church events that are the focus of the curriculum, the faith of individuals and the whole family is strengthened and deepened.
4. *Household Faith Reflection*: Through reflection activities, families and individuals are given the resources to reflect on the meaning of their participation in the event, to connect it to what they learned at the intergenerational program, and to reflect on how to live their faith.

One way churches connect the intergenerational learning program and people's participation in the church event to the home is through a home kit of resources and activities for the whole household, as well as for individuals of different ages. Here are home kit ideas for the Justice and Solidarity session described previously.

- *Learning*: a contemporary map of the world, Scripture readings and reflections on the Bible's teaching on solidarity, stories of people from around the world, *If the World Were a Village—A Book about the World's People* (children's book), drawing activities for children

- *Service*: a "how to guide" for purchasing fair trade items (coffee, chocolate, food), solidarity action projects with descriptions of local, national, and global projects, raising funds to support action projects
- *Prayer and Rituals*: weekly table prayers for solidarity, table placemats with prayer petitions for people's needs around the world, eating a simple meal each week and giving the money to an organization that serves the needs of the poor

Practice 4: Collaborative, Empowering, Team-Based Leadership

Lifelong faith formation requires a *collaborative* and *empowering* style of congregational leadership. This style of leadership needs to be present not just in one person, such as the pastor or religious educator. It needs to be present in the leadership style of the entire staff and teams responsible for fashioning, implementing, and facilitating lifelong faith formation. Since lifelong faith formation is related to every aspect of community life, it requires collaboration among all the various leaders and ministries in a congregation. Teamwork and collaboration are essential for effective planning and implementation.

Research with churches implementing an events-centered, intergenerational approach to lifelong faith formation points to several important leadership practices that make for effective implementation of lifelong faith formation:

- the participation and investment of the whole staff and ministry leaders in lifelong faith formation, not just those involved in faith formation
- the active support and involvement of the pastor in lifelong faith formation through encouragement, an empowering style, a long term commitment, and advocacy.
- the presence of a coordinator who fully understands the vision and can work with others to implement it
- effective teams that have a shared vision for implementation and practice teamwork and collaboration
- a large number of committed volunteer leaders who are engaged in a variety of roles in lifelong faith formation including planning, teaching, organizing, and supporting.

- volunteer leaders who are empowered and trusted to take responsibility for key aspects of the implementation of lifelong faith formation
- concerted efforts to integrate lifelong faith formation with existing parish programs and ministries

Churches develop various leadership structures to implement lifelong faith formation. There are at least two important teams: the faith formation leadership team and the program implementation team. The *Leadership Team* which includes the church staff and faith formation leaders assume responsible for developing and coordinating the faith formation plan:

- promoting and communicating the vision of lifelong faith formation
- fashioning the lifelong curriculum
- developing the implementation plan for the lifelong curriculum
- developing leadership for lifelong faith formation: inviting people into leadership, providing training for leaders, and supporting leaders
- evaluating the implementation of the plan

The *Leadership Team* can also be responsible for designing the intergenerational program and creating/selecting household resources. Some churches develop a separate team that designs the learning programs and home resources.

The *Program Implementation Team* has the primary responsibility for conducting intergenerational learning programs. The *Implementation Team* includes people who will be directly involved in the organization and facilitation of intergenerational learning, and people who will be involved in administrative and support roles. A typical intergenerational learning program will involve a variety of leaders, such as:

- Program Facilitator
- Learning Group Facilitator: Leader for age-appropriate learning groups, e.g., families with children, young adolescents, older adolescents, young adults, adults
- Facilitators for age-appropriate learning groups
- Assistants to help with age-appropriate learning activities
- Prayer leader for opening and closing prayer
- Music leader and/or music team for prayer and activities
- Set-up and clean-up staff
- Food preparation and service staff
- Creative arts staff for artwork, posters, signs, etc.
- Promotion and correspondence staff

- Hospitality and registration staff
- Home kit staff
- Administration

One of the key roles in intergenerational learning is the Program Facilitator for a particular program. The Facilitator manages the team conducting the program and the logistics of the program, and facilitates the flow of the learning program. The Facilitator. . .

- works as a member of the Leadership Team to plan the intergenerational program and recruit leaders to conduct the programs
- participates in the design and preparation meetings for teaching the program
- manages the team and the various leadership roles necessary for conducting the intergenerational program he or she is leading
- welcomes all the participants and provides an overview of the learning program
- guides the whole group through each element of the learning program
- introduces each learning activity and the leaders; presents instructions as necessary
- keep the program moving on schedule
- facilitates the whole group sharing experience and at-home application at the end of the learning program

Conclusion

The quote from Terrence Tilly which began this article summarizes well the hopes and dreams of an events-centered, intergenerational approach to faith formation "...the main task of handing on the faith is the whole community's task, carried out as members of the community gather together to sustain each other, go out and witness to, and even work to transform (when appropriate) the world in the name of Jesus, the Christ." The approach I have described provides one way to take seriously the task of handing on the faith by involving the whole community in faith formation.

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People of Faith Intergenerational Manuals

Each manual contains six fully designed intergenerational programs. (Published by Harcourt Religion Publishers, Orlando, FL.)

People of Faith—Following Jesus. John Roberto

1. Preparing for the Messiah
2. Becoming a Disciple
3. Dying to Self
4. New Life in Christ
5. Identity of Christ
6. Living as a Disciple

People of Faith—Celebrating Sacraments. Mariette Martineau and Joan Weber.

1. Baptism and Confirmation
2. Eucharist
3. Reconciliation
4. Marriage
5. Holy Orders
6. Anointing of the Sick

People of Faith—Professing Our Faith. John Roberto.

1. We Believe in God
2. We Believe in Jesus Christ

3. We Believe in Jesus' Death and Resurrection
4. We Believe in the Holy Spirit
5. We Believe in the Church
6. We Believe in the Communion of Saints

People of Faith—Acting for Justice. John Roberto.

1. Dignity of Human Life
2. Rights and Responsibilities
3. Peace
4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
5. Solidarity with All God's People
6. Care for God's Creation

People of Faith—Living the Moral Life. John Roberto, Mariette Martineau, and Leif Kehrwald

1. Love of God and Neighbor
2. Respect for All Lifelong Faith
3. Being Good Stewards
4. Living Faithfully
5. Being Truthful
6. Mercy and Forgiveness

People of Faith—Responding in Prayer. Leif Kehrwald, Mariette Martineau, and Joan Weber.

1. We Are Called to Pray
2. Catholic Prayers and Devotion
3. The Lord's Prayer
4. Praying through Advent and Christmas
5. Praying through Lent and Easter
6. Praying the Rosary



Practice Ideas

Example: Connecting Faith, Worship, and Life Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, Acton, MA (www.seoh.org)

Based upon the Gospel and the call of Pope Benedict XVI and his predecessors for a new evangelization and stronger catechetical effort, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish uses a liturgy-centered, lifelong, and intergenerational approach to Catholic faith formation. The goal is to help and support everyone who wishes to become a better disciple by integrating faith, worship, and life in light of the Gospel. Since this is an ongoing, lifelong task, everyone in the parish is invited to participate.

What is Generations of Faith?

Generations of Faith is an innovative approach to faith formation that equips the parish to become a community of lifelong learning. Faith formation is centered in the events of church life, embraces all ages and generations, and promotes faith growth at home. Through worship, learning, service, and community, GOF offers whole community catechesis to support everyone's Christian journey no matter one's age or stage. A program of lifelong, intergenerational formation, GOF has three basic components, all of which are essential:

- The first and *most important* component of faith formation is regular and active participation at Sunday Mass.
- The second is the monthly intergenerational learning session.
- The third is a personal, daily effort to live as a good Christian, and to increase in faith, hope, and charity. This is how a faithful people makes its way back to God.

The key is to bring these three activities together such that each one supports and is supported by the other two. Faith formation requires us to bring faith, worship, and life together, and respond to the power and insight that emerges when we do that. The goal of faith formation is to know, love, and serve the Lord ever better and more fruitfully.

The Structure of Generations of Faith

The Generations program offers three means of catechesis. Each component is critical to the overall effectiveness of this method of faith development.

First of all, each month's formation theme will come from selected Sunday readings. The scriptures will provide the foundation for liturgical catechesis around each theme which will be developed through the music, homily, and prayers during Mass. Experiencing church life, events, and seasons through the liturgies is the source for the Generations formation approach. As formation sessions are designed to prepare and reflect on the readings from Mass, it is important to attend Sunday liturgies.

The second part of the Generations program is attending the monthly formation session.

Formation sessions will include comprehensive faith formation including the following:

1. Knowledge of the faith
2. Liturgical life
3. Moral formation
4. Prayer
5. Belonging to a community
6. Missionary spirit

Formation sessions will provide activities and content consistent with the readings and experiences in the selected Mass. Sessions will include a meal, large group activities, reflection, prayers, and instruction, and breakout sessions based on developmental levels. All households have been assigned to a particular formation session.

Finally, the third component of the Generations of Faith model is the home kit. The Catholic Church sees the family as "the domestic church," integrating home and parish into a comprehensive model of faith formation. The home kits are designed to help extend and expand the learning from the formation sessions and Masses. The goal is to create a pattern of family faith sharing that is integral

to family life and woven into the fabric of daily life. Home kits will include materials to enable the following:

- Celebrating traditions and rituals
- Learning the Catholic faith story
- Praying together
- Serving others and working for justice
- Enriching relationships and daily life

Generations of Faith 2007-08

The Curriculum

1. September: Mass for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Luke 15:1-32)
2. October: Mass for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Luke: 17:11-19)
3. November: Mass for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Luke 20:27-38)
4. December: Mass for the 2nd Sunday of Advent (Matthew 3:1-12)
5. January: Mass for the Baptism of the Lord (Matthew 3:13-17)
6. February: Mass for the 1st Sunday of Lent (Matthew 4:1-11)
7. March: Mass for Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:1-11 and Matthew 26:14—27:66)
8. April: Mass for the 4th Sunday of Easter (John 10:1-10)
9. May: Mass for Holy Trinity Sunday (John 3: 16-18)

Monthly Program Schedule

1. Wednesday 5:30—8:00 p.m.
2. Saturday 6:15—8:45 p.m.
(kindergarten session offered)
3. Sunday-1 12:00—2:30 p.m.
(kindergarten session offered)
4. Sunday-2 5:00—7:30 p.m.

Intergenerational Program Model: Age Appropriate Learning Groups

The breakouts are subgroups that participate in developmentally-appropriate activities and instruction during the intergenerational learning program. They are designed to enhance parents' participation in their children's faith formation, build community among participants of similar age and experience, and promote the formational process in general. Most of the monthly sessions include breakout sessions.

1. Primary Level (Grades K-4) & Parents

Parents and children work together under the direction of trained leaders and facilitators to

explore each month's focus area. Large group, small group, and individual instruction are provided, but the parent serves as the primary catechist for each child. This level is designed for children in K – Grade 4. Younger children are welcome to come to be with their family, but there will not be specific catechesis for them. Additionally Kindergarten sessions will be only offered during the Saturday evening and the Sunday afternoon sessions. Grade 5 students and parents who are more comfortable working in this setting for part or all of the year are welcome to stay with their family. (All children preparing for First Eucharist register for both Generations of Faith and First Eucharist.)

2. Middle or Intermediate Level (Grades 5-8)

Middle grade children gather with group leaders to explore each month's lesson in a developmentally appropriate way. This may include reading, discussion, drama, hands-on activities, and/or service work. This level is designed for younger adolescents in grades 5-8. Parents are welcome to attend all or part of this session with their children or they may attend the adult session. It is required that a parent be on site during the entire GOF session.

3. Senior Level (Grades 9-12)

High school students gather under the leadership of the parish youth ministry coordinator and group leaders to explore the month's theme at a deeper and more personal level. The goals of this session include using the focus area as a call to spiritual development and service to others. Parents and/or Confirmation sponsors are most welcome to attend these sessions with their teens. This level is designed for older adolescents in grades 9-12. (All Confirmation candidates must register for both Generations of Faith and Confirmation preparation.)

4. Adult Level

Parents, couples, single adults, and retired adults gather to explore the focus area using techniques and processes that have proven effective for adult learners. Confirmed teens in grades 11 and 12, and/or young adults living at home are welcome to participate in the adult breakout session. (GOF registration is free for seniors 65 and older.)