

Adult Faith Formation: Resources and Directions

Let's begin by considering some of the basics that precede the actual implementation of adult faith formation in a parish or deanery setting.

1. Keep in mind that there is a flexibility to adult faith formation that you don't find in catechizing children (i.e. You don't have specific goals that need to be reached; you have a wide variety of options when it comes to resources; you have more freedom in regards to things like time/place, etc.)
2. Try to identify what you believe would be the greatest draw in your parish in regards to faith formation opportunities. Are parishioners starving for a solid Catholic Bible study? Are they looking for a deeper understanding of many of the basics of Catholic belief (i.e. the meaning of the Sacraments; the role of the liturgy; principles of the moral life, etc.). Are they more likely to be interested in a Catholic book club? If you struggle to identify an area of interest on your own, you may want to consider asking your pastor if you could include a parish interest survey in the church bulletin.
3. Consider various formats for adult faith formation that you think would be successful in your parish. For example, would a consistent weekly meeting be best, with a fall and spring session? (maybe 6 or 10 weeks at a time?) Would it be more successful if you focused your efforts on specific liturgical seasons, such as lent and advent? Would it be better to meet on a monthly basis? Would it be better to center faith formation around parish "retreats" or "missions" at different points during the year?
4. Brainstorm about meeting places and times that are optimal for engaging the greatest number of interested parishioners. In this regard it is best to "think outside the box." For example:
 - ✓ Weekends do not tend to be great for most people today. Is it possible to have a successful adult faith formation program on a weekend? Yes—and some parishes do—but it tends to be more difficult because of youth sports, dance recitals, etc. If you are focused on weekends, you may want to consider scheduling it parallel

to your CCD program so that parents receive formation at the same time that their children are.

- ✓ Consider having more than one meeting time for adult faith formation events. This is one way to cater to the needs of the various groups in your parish. For example, some groups have a lot of success by having a weekly afternoon and evening session. The afternoon session tends to work well for mothers with young children, retirees, and those who work nights. The evening session draws large numbers of adults who work during the day.
 - ✓ In regards to attracting young families, consider working out some form of child care that will make it easier for them to attend. My wife attends a weekly Bible study 30 minutes from our home specifically because it meets during the day and provides child care for our 1 and 3 year old. The agreement is that there is one parish volunteer each week in the child care room and then the mothers and/or fathers who attend the Bible study rotate weeks where they assist in the supervision of the children.
 - ✓ When it comes to location, the obvious place is the parish hall, but if you make adult faith formation a deanery wide initiative, or if your parish is combined with other parishes, you may want to consider rotating the location among the various neighboring churches. For some groups, having a parishioner host the event at their home may be even more effective.
5. Remember that personal invitation is key. Parish bulletin inserts, announcements from the pulpit—these are all good ways of publicizing an event—but none of them are as effective as approaching someone and personally inviting them. In extending these invitations one thing you may want to do is approach those who are already active in some form of parish ministry (ex. cantors, lectors, extraordinary ministers of Communion, ushers, altar and rosary society, etc.) since they may be more likely to seek out faith formation opportunities. You may also want to go out of your way to invite

young families, since many times they are eager to connect with their parish, but they don't know how to (also consider sending a personal note to families who have recently had a child baptized or couples who have recently been married).

6. Never underestimate the attraction of including a social aspect to your faith formation gatherings. In this regard a common meal—whether potluck or provided by the parish—at the beginning or close of the event can be especially appealing.
7. And, finally, don't get caught up in numbers. The success of your adult faith formation endeavors cannot be measured by attendance, but by impact on the faith lives of those who participate or benefit from it, whether that be 2 or 200 people.