

Education Commission Meeting Minutes

January 12, 2010

In Attendance: Jane Carroll (Staff Member), Katie Gebhard (Staff Member), Pat Bredekamp (Staff Member), Mary Zielinski, Tom Nathe, Mary Powell, Sherry Campeau, Lisa Zastoupil

Absent:

Electronic handouts distributed prior to the meeting: January 2010 Principal's Report, January 2010 Faith Formation Report, Parish Survey of Faith Formation Programs.

Handouts distributed at the meeting: Recommendations regarding faith formation programs, List of daily events at Epiphany Catholic School for Catholic Schools Week, 2009-2010 Mid-year strategic plan.

1. Meeting called to order at 7:20 pm.
2. December meeting minutes approved via email.
3. Faith Formation survey findings
Epiphany surveyed 19 parishes in the Twin City metro area about their faith formation programs. Epiphany is evaluating their own programs to ensure they are as effective as possible. Results of the survey are attached at the end of these minutes.
4. Program recommendations
See the list of recommendations attached at the end of the minutes.
5. Catholic Schools week

Jane passed out a draft of events scheduled at Epiphany for Catholic Schools Week. One item of emphasis will be the retention of elementary students into Jr. High. The "Nothing-Fest" this year will be for students in grades 6-8. Parents follow their students daily schedule.
6. Parish mission: February 21-23
Katie passed out fliers for the Lenten mission this year. These will be mailed out to parishioners prior to the mission.
7. Strategic Plan: mid-year report/review
Jane passed out a copy of 2009-2010 Mid-year strategic plan progress for commission members to review.

8. Reports: Advisory Committees, Faith Formation, School, Parish Council
No education advisory committee meeting in December. Faith formation advisory committee covered topics discussed above.

9. Adjournment with Prayer

Next meeting: February 16, 2010

Faith Formation January, 2010 Education Commission Report

December was a very full month. Our Sunday School presented a Christmas Program for parents and interested parishioners on December 20. They did a wonderful job and parents were very pleased. Our 2nd Graders celebrated their First Reconciliation on Thursday, December 17. This year we had children celebrate it along with the parish during the longer Day of Reconciliation. Several of our priests were in a special place where only our 2nd graders celebrated the sacrament. This way, children had the experience that would be 'normal' for our parish during Advent and Lent, but our priests were available just for them for a certain time frame. Children could go to any priest if they wanted to. They also had the option of celebrating the sacrament on a regular weekday or weekend time. Middle and High School teens had a Christmas party on December 20 and about 40 of them went snow tubing on December 29.

We did choose to cancel classes on Wednesday, December 9th. When that happens, we immediately put it on the parish website, email about 75% of families and catechists and notify our school and parish office. We announce it on WCCO only after 3:00 in order not to confuse parents who might think the school is closing early.

January brings many events and extra meetings. We begin our First Eucharist parent meetings on January 26th and 27th and Confirmation meetings on January 19th or 21st. Tenth graders will begin participating in their retreats during January and February. At the end of January both our middle and high school teens can participate in an over night/weekend retreat away from here. It has a history of being a wonderful, faith-filled experience for them. We are fortunate that our LifeTeen band joins us and provides outstanding praise and worship music. All programs will have their regular sessions and we will finish teaching our 'Protection of Children and Youth' lessons. RCIA continues to meet weekly and prepare for the Rite of Election on February 21 at the Basilica. We are working very hard on our upcoming Lenten Mission. A mailing will be going out to all parishioners that includes a letter from Fr. Zehren, a brochure and a refrigerator magnet. Signs will go up on and around the building at the end of the month.

Our staff has spent November and December exploring faith formation models and curriculum at various parishes around the archdiocese. We will now make some decisions based on the parent/catechist evaluations, listening sessions, other parish surveys, our experiences and recommendations from an outside group that visited 1 1/2 years ago. Our evaluations will also include curriculum and other resources.

Principal's Report to the Education Commission

January, 2009

Kindergarten Roundup. Kindergarten Roundup is today January 7th, from 3:30-5:00 or 6:00-7:30. We have marketed Roundup in a variety of ways:

- Our November Open House.
- Over 235 post card invitations were sent.
- Notices in Epiphany Extra and the parish bulletin.
- Responding and following up to phone calls.

We created a Power Point presentation to share highlights of the kindergarten program and school.

Catholic Schools Week ---January 31-5. We are well underway with plans for CSW. This year's theme is *Catholic Schools---Dividends for Life: Faith, Knowledge, Discipline, and Morals*. You'll notice a marketing thrust throughout the week. Here a just of few of the week's activities:

Sunday, January 31 Open House, 10:00-12:00. We hope to have a strong school presence at

the 8:45 AM Mass. We've sent invitations to 4,500 area families with children

ages 3-10. Hopefully, we'll have many folks exploring Epiphany.

Tuesday, February 2 "The Epiphany Advantage" We plan to have a panel of junior high, high school

and adult alumni join us to share the advantages of being at Epiphany through 8th grade. 4th and 5th grade parents are invited to join us---tentatively scheduled for the afternoon.

Wednesday/Friday A fun Epiphany tradition is families joining us for an early morning breakfast.

Wednesday and Families with the oldest child in grades 6-8 are scheduled for

families with the oldest in K-5 will be held on Friday, 6:30-7:30.

Wednesday, Feb. 3 Back by popular demand, we're inviting parents of 6th through 8th graders to

"shadow" their son/daughter for a bit right after breakfast.

Friday , February 5 Every grade will be sharing some talent at a showcase of Epiphany Talent, 1:00

in the gym.

Outreach to Others. As part of our school-wide observance of Advent, students and families participated in numerous outreach. Here is a sampling:

- Students in second, fourth, fifth, and seventh grade, supported by our families, purchased gifts for families in one of our inner city schools. The families, who live in poverty, make great sacrifices to attend a Catholic school. Our gifts provided basic needs for a number of families.

- Epiphany's junior high band performed at the Coon Rapids Senior Center, bringing joyful sounds of the season. The junior high choir sang for shoppers at Northtown, proclaiming the true message of the season.
- Sixth grade students shared their musical gifts at Epiphany Assisted Living and the Pines. First graders made books marks for residents.
- Kindergarten students are donated gently used books to Catholic Charities and third grade collected books for St. Joseph's Children's Home.
- Additionally, eighth graders helped an Epiphany family. Our kindergartners were "Advent Angels" by good deeds at home and in their neighborhood. Many of our students helped sort and organize the many gifts that were distributed by Epiphany Pastoral Care.

Revised Strategic Plan. Epiphany's finalized plan was sent to the Accreditation Association (MNSAA) prior to the holidays. We have since received commendation for our commitment to strategic improvement and excellence. It is posted on the school's web site and can be found at: Parent Information/School Advisory Committee/Meeting Highlights.

Junior High Service Experience. Beginning this month, Epiphany seventh and eighth graders will have an opportunity to volunteer at **Caring & Sharing Hands** in Minneapolis. As part of religion class, students will help serve a meal and learn about the important ways Caring and Sharing Hands is a bridge between a caring community and people in need. Monthly, they serve over 20,000 meals, provide food/cloth/medical assistance, and much more. All with volunteers, love and care. For more information, go to www.caringandsharinghands.org . Special thanks to Chrysa Gatzmer, parent, for her leadership and coordination.

Parish Survey of Faith Formation Programs January 5, 2010

During November and December, 2009, 19 parishes were reviewed, mostly from 2nd and 3rd ring suburbs. Ten of these parishes have an elementary school. Members of the Faith Formation Advisory Committee and parish staff contacted parishes and reviewed information on the parish website. We are awaiting a report on 4 additional parishes.

Findings:

Early Childhood:

- Most had traditional Sunday School programs during Mass and use Our Sunday Visitor, Harcourt, Sadlier or RCL/Benziger materials
- Several use the 'Catechesis of the Good Shepherd' Montessori program. A few parishes also offered this program for elementary children.

Elementary:

- Majority had weekly sessions
- A few had classes 2 times a month with a 'family event' every 4-6 weeks and parents teaching a class or two at home
- Many used either Harcourt or RCL/Benziger materials
- St. Paul's in Ham Lake writes their own materials to be used at home for most of the month – parents come onsite about every 6 weeks for materials, activities and trainings. St. Odilia's uses this program too.
- St. John Neumann in Eagan offers a program where parents can gather in 'clusters' – they meet in someone's home where the group decides the date and time.
- St. Edward's offered a 'Family approach' where children participate in a monthly gathering and parents teach them at home for other sessions. The parish provides materials for the parents to use. Children are expected to participate in weekly Mass and Word for Children and VBS.
- Pax Christi offers a variety of formats: weekly sessions, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and 'House Church' where 5-6 families gather at someone's home to teach a variety of ages of children. They use the RCL home materials for this group.
- All parishes had a family centered First Reconciliation/Eucharist Program. Those that celebrated First Reconciliation in 4th grade have now changed it to 2nd grade. Parents attend at least one meeting and most have either a parent/child retreat or 'learning centers' around the sacramental theme. First Eucharist celebrations are either in 2-3 large group settings during Mass right after Easter or 15-20 children celebrate it at a variety of Masses for several weeks after Easter.

Middle School:

- Most parishes include grades 6-8, but some have 6th grade with the elementary program

- St. John Neumann gave 8th graders the NCEA/ACRE inventory and adapted some curriculum based on the results. Teens meet in homes with parents taking turns facilitating. Teens stay in the same group for a few years. They also offer 'Family Clusters' for middle and high school – the whole family gathers in groups of 4-5 families within an area. A variety of resources are used for this group.
- Most parishes offered weekly sessions – many using Harcourt, St. Mary's Press or a lectionary-based resource. Some wrote their own curriculum. They all offered a variety of youth ministry events.

High School:

- Most offered weekly sessions on either Sunday or Wednesday. All indicated challenges with teens being very busy and sometimes it was difficult for them to attend sessions.
- Several parishes (St. Therese, Deephaven, St. Pius X in White Bear Lake and St. Hubert's in Chanhassen) offered a 4-6 week session covering an area of the pillars of the CCC. Teens needed to take each modular (4 in all) before they were enrolled in a Confirmation program. Two parishes offered sessions during the summer, so in reality, the program was offered year round to better accommodate teen schedules. Most parishes used resources from St. Mary's Press. A few used some resources from LifeTeen and other companies plus staff writing sessions using numerous resources.
- St. Hubert's offered weekly, monthly and summer sessions. The summer ones were taught by paid professional teachers.
- St. Stephen's (Anoka) and St. Joseph's (Lino Lakes) have teens at the parish for 1 semester and out in the parish/area doing service for another semester. This is done because of space issues at the parish site and their desire to engage teens in the parish/local community.
- All parishes combine both large and small group experiences along with guest speakers for both middle and high school.

Confirmation is celebrated mostly in 10th grade. Teens and parents participate in 4-6 week sessions, a retreat and service. A few parishes offered some type of program for post Confirmation teens. All offered a variety of youth ministry events including a mission trip.

General Comments:

All parishes had 1-2 catechist training sessions in the fall and some had one in January. There was a reoccurring desire for more trainings, but either nothing else was scheduled or catechists didn't come for additional training due to time constraints.

All parishes struggle with incorporating more intergenerational and/or parent enrichment and involvement. Everyone provided special processes for unbaptized older children or those who had been baptized, but had not celebrated Reconciliation/Eucharist and were older than 10. They also offered Special Education

assistance in a variety of ways - either in a special class, mainstreaming them into a regular class with additional assistance or one – on –one.

All parishes had paid professionally trained staff coordinating the programs.

Some of the greatest challenges are catechist training, parental involvement and children/teens who only come for sacramental years – many being non-practicing Catholics who come in 2nd and 10th grade to receive a sacrament.

Larger parishes offer multiple choices in formats.

Epiphany Parish:

We offer traditional weekly classes for children aged 3 – high school. Our Sunday Visitor's 'I Am Special' program is used with 3 and 4 year olds and Harcourt with grades K – 8. St. Mary's Press' 'Catholic Youth Handbook' and LifeTeen are used with high school. Our middle and high school families have a choice of formats: We use the LifeTeen materials on Sunday night for both groups. Wednesday night is 'more structured', using Harcourt and St. Mary's Press as the primary resource. Numerous youth ministry events are offered to both middle and high school teens. We do large groups with Grades 6-8 and 9-10 together and small groups by grade level.

Parents participate in sacramental meetings for Reconciliation/Eucharist and Confirmation. Children are with parents for 'learning centers'. Teens attend special Confirmation sessions with their parents, participate in a retreat and do service projects. Sacramental sessions bring together all parish children/teens – those attending Catholic or public schools or those who are home schooled because sacraments are celebrated on the parish level.

Baptism preparation consists of one 1 ¼ hour session. There is a growing need to offer parents something during the early childhood years. Many parents appear to be non-practicing Catholics or have little connection to the parish, even if they were raised here. We now do ask that at least one parent be a registered member of Epiphany.

We offer a wide variety of adult enrichment events, including Bible study, RCIA, Confirmation, returning Catholic, Lenten small faith sharing groups and this year, a parish wide mission.

Our faith formation staff collaborates with the parish school in numerous ways, including sacramental preparation, sharing of resources and youth ministry events.

Recommendations regarding faith formation programs:

1. Provide more opportunities for parent enrichment
2. Provide something for 4th-5th grade parents to assist with 'Family Life' education/values
3. Provide additional and ongoing catechist/core team formation on facilitating discussion groups, handling behavior/discipline issues, prayer models, learning styles and deepening their spiritual life.
4. Engage children/teens at all levels in more social justice/service opportunities
5. Engage teens more in the life of the parish (have them 'shadow staff/volunteers... assist with Food Shelf, Basket Programs, Springfest, ushers, sacristans, VBS, etc.)
6. Provide more consistent curriculum in middle and high school between Sunday and Wednesday sessions
7. Develop a different model for our high school teens that addresses their learning, social, spiritual, developmental, family and work needs (e.g. have 4-6 week sessions 4 times a year with breaks in between)
8. Provide additional youth ministry opportunities – times for a youth group, more 'issue nights with teens or teens/parents, peer ministry training, etc.
9. Collaborate more with the 8th graders from the school to better meet their needs as they enter the high school program
10. Provide more opportunities for intergenerational experiences (Advent, Lent, etc.)
11. Look into ways to better meet the needs of children/teens with special needs
12. Explore more ways to provide support to parents with our youngest children (big gap between Baptism and beginning of school)
13. Evaluate the current Baptism Preparation Program to better meet the needs of parents returning to the church or who are non-practicing.

Given feedback from various groups we would like to proceed with offering the same structure for children aged 3 – grade 8. We are reviewing different models for high school.

These comments/recommendations are from our faith formation team after consultation with parents and catechists. They also include recommendations from Jane Hilger and Sharon Horgan who did an 'outside evaluation' 1 ½ years ago.