

Faith on Fire Rationale 2021-2022

Saint Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Church

“I can’t wait to get back to normal!” We have heard this in so many arenas: school, work, sports and church. This pandemic has been so very hard on families in a myriad ways: losing childcare, juggling working at home and virtual schooling, being an essential worker and needing to leave for work, being cut off from extended family and support systems. Not to mention the stress of having loved ones sick and not being able to be with them or to have a loved one dying and not be able to be beside them as they walk to their heavenly home. We have missed out on graduations, weddings, birthday celebrations and vacations. It has been a crazy, unprecedented year indeed.

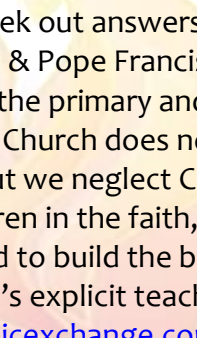
However, if one listens deeper, there were and are benefits that came from this year of ‘staying safe at home.’ The pandemic brought along new and unique opportunities to reconnect with our nucleus family. More families started taking walks or bike rides together, family mealtime was resurrected, and time was spent doing new activities like puzzles or board games.

As our lives were stripped of outside commitments, we found more time to ‘be’ rather than to ‘do.’ For many of us, our lives moved from hectic to a calmer pace and we learned that our jobs could be done virtually and our family reclaimed the main focus of our life.

As this unprecedented religious formation year ended, we were very excited to receive many positive comments about the new Faith on Fire formation. Comments like: “We were able to have real discussions about our faith. We learned new prayers together, and we were able to connect over the Scripture readings. I learned quite a bit along with my children.”

These comments brought to our minds a statistic that was shared at a seminar we attended a few years ago. The seminar, presented by St. Mary’s Press, was on why our young people are leaving the faith. (Going, Going, Gone, The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics, Saint Mary’s Press). We learned that the average age a child decides to stay or leave the faith is now around 12-13 years of age! We began to pay particular attention to what was happening in our own parish. We noticed changes in our own religious education program: Students are disengaged, parents are exhausted, and volunteer catechists are hard to come by. We asked ourselves, “Were students sticking around after Confirmation?” Sadly, a majority were not actively engaged in their Catholic faith after being confirmed.

This caused us to consider, “Are students learning enough in one hour a week to not only sustain, but grow their faith?” How can a child learn their faith in just 30 hours spread out over the course of a year (0.3% of their time)? That is like sending your child to school for one week each year! We also wondered, “Can parents be exploring & learning their faith alongside their child? How does this impact a child’s maturing faith life? Would it increase the chances of our children choosing to remain lifelong Catholics?”



During this past year we had time to seek out answers to these questions. We needed to only look to our Catholic faith Tradition & Pope Francis for the answers, as we learned that the Church strongly affirms parents as the primary and principal educators of their children in the faith. Does this suggest that the Church does not have important role to play in religious education? Absolutely not! But we neglect Church teaching if we assume the role of primary educator of our parish children in the faith, taking it away from the parents who have all the right tools and time needed to build the best faith community within the home. That message is contrary to the Church's explicit teaching about the nature of religious education. (See more at: <https://catholicexchange.com/faith-parents-best-teachers>)

We began to feel a deep calling from the Holy Spirit to focus more of our faith formation efforts on the family and helping them experience God more naturally within the daily rhythm of their lives. This approach does not involve head knowledge or tests to validate learning, rather it is a chance to include parents more intentionally in the faith journey of our young parishioners. This is not to overwhelm you or place the burden entirely on your shoulders, but to help you prepare your children for a life-long journey with God. Your children will one day be navigating the world away from the closeness of home and your daily guidance. When confronted with the 'valleys' of life, we pray that your children will ascend safely. We desire for your children will be reasons of hope for others because their belief in God stands out as something pretty fantastic. Their formation is life-long and does not end in the eighth grade at Confirmation. In fact, it is just the beginning! Less than one percent of their year spent in religious education class is not enough to help our children navigate this large and diverse world as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The institution of the Church cannot compete with the daily love and learning that is experienced in the family. However, we are here to support you as we desire the same thing as you do for your children... That they are happy, healthy, and strongly rooted in the awesome life of God!

With all of this in mind, we would like to present to you "a better than normal" faith formation this year continuing with the Pflaum model that we introduced last year. Don't panic and please give us a chance to explain! We also heard cries of "This was too hard with multiple children. I just couldn't find a consistent time to do this. My children need to hear about the faith from other faithful Catholics." We will offer more opportunities for students to be in person with their peers and volunteer Catechists (if we get enough volunteers). We have worked very hard to find better ways to support you as you pass your faith on to your children. We will feature more in person & video instruction for parents, enabling you to feel equipped to dive into each week's theme. We are here to reinforce and enhance the teaching you do in your family school/church or 'little Church of the home.' Our hope is that along the way you will enkindle your own relationship with God, his Son Jesus, and our Catholic faith.

We are grateful for your support and patience as we navigate through this 'better than normal' year with you. Thank you for your support and God bless.

Mary Lou