

GIFT – Growing in Faith Together – is for each, and every, one of us!!!

Pages and pages could be, and have been, written on the validity of the GIFT format and the shortcomings of the “traditional classroom” style of religious formation. (See *Toward an Adult Church* by Dr. Jane Regan; *Whole Community Catechesis in Plain English* by Bill Huebsch; *Religious Education at a Crossroads...* by Francoise Darcy-Berube, etc.) Here, I have put together a “side-by-side” comparison that is based on the work of these authors, and others, including my involvement in religious formation for over twenty years, and the work of my integrating project that was part of completing my masters degree in religious education. –P. Casing, DRE

Directive of the Church	“Traditional Program”	Intergenerational Formation –“GIFT,” and other current parish programs
Faith formation is to be life-long	Focus is on children; adult formation is offered in the parish, but adults are seldom receptive	Focus is on the entire parish community. Not only children, but ALL adults are encouraged to attend. Recognition is made that parents need formation, themselves, to live up to their responsibility as the “primary catechists of their children.” If children go home and the attitudes, actions, and values are not what we are presenting, any information we present will be seen as irrelevant and out of touch with real life. That is the reason why adult presence here is paramount!
AND systematic	Children follow a book which has been developed following a learning format that emphasizes repetition of themes.	We follow a six year cycle that also repeats themes. Each year has a main theme, topics relate to the theme, yet include basic concepts that are the foundations of our faith. Each month includes prayer, scripture, knowledge of tradition, etc. WE FOLLOW THE DIOCESAN STANDARDS for children’s formation. These are the same standards that Catholic schools and other RE programs are held to.
Knowledge of scripture:	In most textbooks every 4 th chapter is devoted to a scripture story, other stories and quotes are scattered throughout.	We make a huge effort to include a large variety of scripture for all of our youth breakouts, each month, with little exception. We also provide weekly scripture and Mass formation through Children’s Liturgy of the Word (Many parishes do not) Scripture is important to us!!!

GIFT 2007-2008 Themes and Dates:

September 9, 12, 14, 18

This month, Tuesday’s session will move to the following week due to the local election!
Theme: Christians... Are We All the Same? Celebrating Our Catholic Identity

October 14, 16, 17, 19

Theme: Living as a Disciple

November 11, 13, 14, 16

Theme: Preparing for the Messiah

December 9, 11, 12, 14

Theme: Mary: Model of Discipleship

January 13, 15, 16, 18

Theme: Becoming a Disciple

February 10, 12, 13, 15

Theme: Dying to Self (Including the Stations of the Cross)

March 9, 11, 12, 14

Theme: New Life in Christ

April 13, 15, 16, 18

I Am the Way and the Truth and the Life
Theme: Identity of Christ (including our different names/titles for Jesus)

May 13, 14, 16, 18

Theme: Jesus: In Place and Time (learning about the land, the customs and the traditions of Jesus’ day)

June 8, 10, 11, 13

Theme: What Would Jesus Do? -- The Morality of a Disciple (including the Church’s teaching on conscience formation)

Registration Info: 248-844-8662, or stmarysofthehills.org

GIFT Supports the Best Family Values!

In August, 2007, "Family Facts.org" posted a collection of their "Top Ten Findings" of the benefits of families spending time together:

1. "Spending time in everyday family leisure activities is associated with greater emotional bonding within the family." GIFT allows you to spend time together socializing, playing games, and learning... providing a great environment.
2. "Children in families that participate in religious activities together are more likely to report seeing expressions of love and affection between their parents." When parents attend GIFT together, they provide a unifying environment that demonstrates mutual support for each other, and for their family.
3. "Parents of families in which both the parents and children attend religious services are more likely to know their children's social networks." GIFT allows time for building relationships, and meeting individuals that our children know from school, or sports, etc.
4. "Children's academic success is associated with having mothers who frequently talk and listen to them." GIFT provides time for conversation and sharing, about the things that are deepest inside us, and most important
5. "Adolescents who spend quality time with their fathers are less likely to exhibit behavioral problems." GIFT provides an avenue for sharing this quality time!
6. "Children whose fathers spend time with them doing activities in the home tend to have better academic performance." GIFT offers the opportunity for time spent at church, AND at home! The shared experience creates opportunities for conversation and the GIFT packets that are sent home each month provide opportunities for shared prayer, ritual, and tradition building.
7. "Adolescents whose parents are involved in their children's lives tend to exhibit fewer behavioral problems." See above!
8. "Youths who communicate, do activities and have close relationships with their parents are less likely to engage in violence." See above – This is what GIFT is all about!
9. "Teens who frequently have dinner with their families are at a lower risk for substance use." We share a meal at the start of each GIFT session. The meal isn't just for meeting others, though that is important. The meal is also an opportunity for families to sit back and relax. A catered meal where everyone can relax at the table and enjoy each other's company! (What a concept!)
10. "Teens whose parents are home with them after school and in the evening are less likely to experience emotional distress." Shared time is important, and the simple act of "being there" allows all children to know that they are safe and that everything is alright. GIFT provides that same type of environment because children know their parents are just a room or two away. They haven't simply been "dropped off and left behind."

As you can see, GIFT is a great way to support those things that best nurture our children, and our relationships with each other! Please come and give it a try!!!

For more information about the source of our "Top 10" see: <http://www.familyfacts.org/topten.cfm> "A Wise Investment: Benefits from Families Spending Time Together" August 2007.

For more information about GIFT see our website: stmarysofthehills.org or call 248-844-8662

A GIFT Session Looks Like This:

- 1. We start with a meal.**
- 2. We feature an opening activity to introduce the theme to everyone**
- 3. We move on to individual, age appropriate sessions, for children and adults!**
- 4. We close with an activity that reviews what we learned, and/or encourages action and life change based on what we shared that evening.**

Participants come once per month, and they leave better prepared to participate in the life of our community... with a deeper sense of their own spirituality.