

## Adult Formation: Counting the Consequences

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Have you ever wondered: if something were missing, what would life be like? It's an interesting subject to ponder!

Recently, the Adult Faith Formation/Catechetics Committee of the Archdiocesan Board of Catholic Education (Archdiocese of Detroit) did just that.

All of our Church documents for the past thirty years have said that adult faith formation is the core educational effort of the Church. In 1999 the U.S. bishops issued *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*. In this document the bishops reiterated that teaching and called for renewed efforts to make the education and formation of adults the central focus, the top priority of what we do as a church.

And so we asked: are there consequences from **not** making adult faith formation a priority? Or is adult faith formation just a nice thing to do – when we have the time and money left over and are looking for something more to round out our parish calendar for the year?

The following consequences are some which immediately came to mind as the committee began to brainstorm:

- 1) Many adult Catholics would miss out on the fullness of a rich Catholic faith and spirituality which could give significant meaning and direction to their lives.
- 2) Some Catholic adults regard the church as irrelevant or, perhaps, leave the church entirely because what they understand about their faith from their childhood religious education doesn't fit with their current real-life experience. Their past formation was adequate for their younger years but it does not answer the questions of the adult years or today's growing complex world.
- 3) Without adult faith formation, the catechesis of today's children could be adversely affected because parents who are not continually growing in

their faith might not be able or willing to reinforce healthy Christian living and values in the home.

- 4) Adults without updated faith formation might be in a position to be easily influenced by movements and developments, such as fundamentalism, new age trends, misinformation regarding the church as portrayed or reported in the media, etc.
- 5) In some areas and parishes, lay leaders are not being recruited, prepared and formed at a time when the church has a great need for the development of the gifts of the laity and the collaboration of the laity and the ordained in ministry.
- 6) Because of Baptism, all Christians are called to be leaven in society – to bring Gospel values to the world, to government, to the workplace, to the neighborhood, to the family, to all relationships. People cannot do this if they are not aware that this is part of the Baptismal call; they cannot do this if their skills are not being continually developed.
- 7) Adult Catholics are frequently faced in today's world with serious moral choices; the complexity of the choices are growing rapidly with the increase of technology, science, medical advances, etc. Many people are often ill-prepared to base their choices on an awareness of Gospel values and a solid understanding of current Church teaching.
- 8) An inadequately-catechized adult population is less committed to the church financially.

This just scratches the surface of the consequences that flow from not making adult faith formation a priority in our church today.

What do you think? As parishes plan for the future, as teams, staffs, parish leadership plan goals and programs, take time as a parish pastoral council, an education commission, an adult faith formation committee, a parish staff to ask the question: what are the consequences – for our parish – from not making faith formation for adults a priority? Would something **not** happen?

Are you willing to accept the consequences?