

# Piloting A New Course For Sacramental Preparation

During pastoral visits, His Excellency Most Reverend Bishop McGrattan received feedback and in-put about a number of topics. One such topic was sacramental preparation. Both the clergy and the parishioners explained to the Bishop that each parish had their own sacramental preparation program resulting in a wide variety of both content and form (i.e. number of meetings and so on). Additionally, school programs reflected the diversity of practices evident in the parishes. A desire was evolving for consistency in the parishes, families and the schools.

In the spring of 2015, under the direction of Bishop McGrattan, the city deanery of priests took on the task of planning to pilot a common program for parish-based sacramental preparation in the parishes of Immaculate Conception, Sacred Heart, St. Alphonsus Ligouri, St. Anne, St. John the Baptist and St. Peter-in-Chains Cathedral. Fr. Craig Cruikshank explains, “Fr. Bill Moloney and I reviewed three sacramental preparation programs. The program from St. Mary’s Press [*Remember and Celebrate Reconciliation; Remember and Celebrate Eucharist*] was chosen due to its good pastoral content to support children preparing to receive the sacraments and especially because of its intentional focus to engage the parents.” Once the program was chosen, the city pastors and priests met together on September 3<sup>rd</sup> at St. Anne Parish to review it and discuss the program logistics. Bishop McGrattan attended that meeting and said, “I am very impressed with the commitment and unity of the priests to undertake this pilot. This is positive for our Diocese and most importantly, it brings together our shared ministry to support children preparing to receive the sacraments and their families.”

From October to January, there will be four sacramental preparation program sessions for First Reconciliation. From February to May, there will be three sacramental preparation program sessions and a retreat to prepare to receive First Eucharist.

The pastors have worked with parish-based catechists to provide the programs for children. A catechist training session was held in early October. Sixteen parish-based catechists

participated in the session including four priests. The parish-based catechists provided the following feedback about what was helpful for them from the session: “understanding how this program came to be and where it is headed; the dialogue with people from other parishes; the opportunity to share ideas on presentation style; the encouragement; the time to plan with catechists from our parish; and the different presentations which were well prepared so it is easy to follow step by step”.

After the First Reconciliation sacramental preparation session at St. Alphonsus Ligouri Parish, Maureen Thorndyke and Jennifer Ray-Horvath, parish catechists, said, “Children were excited and eager to begin their faith journey towards the Sacrament of Reconciliation.”

Sheri McNeil, Pastoral Assistant at St. Alphonsus Ligouri Parish reflects, “Each sacrament year brings many little blessings in the form of new candidates, and I am reminded of the poem ‘Little Eyes Upon You’ and the impact we have on a child’s faith development. Given that parents are the first and primary faith educators of their children, it is vital to provide support to the family as they journey with the candidate through a sacramental year. As a Pastoral Assistant, having a resource that provides a scaffold for both candidates and parents is key to facilitating that journey.”

Engagement of parents in the sacramental preparation program and the parish is an important component. Fr. Cruikshank says, “Parent are the first educators in

the faith for their children. This program includes many family activities. Because there is such good content – some of it will be done at the parish and some of it at home. The parents will be working with their children not only for review but actually to teach important traditions of the faith.” For this reason, the pilot has been structured so that while sessions for the children are taking place, there will be a parent session running concurrently. Fr. Bill Moloney emphasizes that “the parent sessions will gather the experiences and expertise of parents and provide them with the confidence that God who has called them to this important mission will give them all that they need to accomplish it.” The parent sessions will be led by the pastor or a pastoral team member of the parish. Parents will be invited



**Catechist Training Session, October 3 at Immaculate Conception Rectory. Catechists from St. Alphonsus Ligouri and St. John the Baptist attended this session. L to R: Maureen Thorndyke, Sr. Advocata, Christina Callaghan, Sheri McNeil and Fr. Balonwu Okpe.**

## Contributed by

**Fr. Craig Cruikshank,  
Fr. Bill Moloney  
and Deirdre Thomas**

to participate in discussions about the faith and helping their child to prepare to receive the sacraments.

Feedback and shared partnerships are a critical part of the pilot year experience. Parents will be receiving an Exit Card (feedback sheet) to complete after each parent session. The experience and learning from the pilot year will guide the expansion of the program to all the parishes of the Diocese.

When asked to give feedback about the first parent session detailing what was helpful for them in their faith and their role as a parent supporting their child's faith journey, parents from St. Alphonsus Ligouri Parish said:

- “Reminded me of my active role in his (my child’s) spiritual development
- To see so many families come together to support their child on this journey
- Video emphasis on following God’s teaching as it is interpreted by Church
- The visual aspect with the video and slideshow is appreciated.
- Small group discussion was helpful; good to hear the perspective of other parents and grandparents
- Pleased to hear that these sessions are being delivered (expanded) throughout the Diocese as a consistent message; I believe that an important step has been made in that all parishes are on the same page.
- That God, through/with the Church is supporting us with our children through this journey.
- Learning what we need to do; Direction; Advice; The simplicity of it
- Seeing other parents struggling with the same questions that I have
- I like knowing what my child will be learning so that we can continue the discussion at home.
- The warm and inviting manner the program begins with presents a supportive atmosphere.”

On September 23<sup>rd</sup> at Immaculate Conception Parish Hall, the Bishop, city pastors and pastoral teams along with Deirdre Thomas, who is supporting sacramental preparation, met with the principals and most Grade 2 teachers from the Peterborough city schools of the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington (PVNC) Catholic District School Board to provide an overview of the pilot program and to present the parish and home pieces as well as the connections to the schools’ Religious Education programs, *We Belong to the Lord Jesus (Year 2)*; *In the Spirit We Belong (Year 3)*; and the documents from the Institute for Catholic Education, *Religious Education*



**St. John the Baptist and Sacred Heart Parishes’ Sacramental Preparation Program with catechist, Christina Callaghan.**

*Policy Document 1-8 and Family Life Education 1-8.* [Next year, there will be a new Religious Education program for Grade 2, *Growing in Faith; Growing in Christ 2* in the Catholic schools and this will replace references made to the current programs, *We Belong to the Lord Jesus (Year 2)* and *In the Spirit We Belong (Year 3)*.]

There was strong support at the meeting from the PVNC Catholic School Board’s senior administration team with the presence of Barbara McMorrow, Director of Education; Rosemary Leclair, Superintendent of Learning / Student Success (Elementary); and Joan Carragher, Superintendent of Learning / Special Education Services. After the meeting, Director of Education Barbara McMorrow affirmed, “The anecdotal feedback on the session and the pilot project is very positive.” Shelley Adair, Principal of St. Catherine Catholic Elementary School also echoed this sentiment, “I think what is happening is wonderful for children and families.”

On the PVNC Catholic School Board’s September 25<sup>th</sup> Professional Activity (PA) Day, the new Grade 1 Religious Education program, *Growing in Faith; Growing in Christ 1*, was introduced to teachers. A member of the clergy was part of each in-service team for the regional sessions held on this PA Day. Fr. Jerry Tavares and Fr. John Perdue spoke with all Grades 1 and 2 teachers in the Peterborough City schools about the parish-based sacramental preparation program affirming a strong working relationship between the home, school and parish.

The pastors recognize families are busy and things come up. Providing a consistent program in all the parishes allows the parishes to work together to support families when family schedules and commitments interfere with attending the parish-based sacramental preparation programs. If parents are unable to attend the session at their parish, they can contact the pastor and arrange to attend a session at another parish. Principals and



teachers also offered to work together with families and pastors to support this communication should schedule pressures arise. In this way, the parishes and schools are working together to support families.

As October drew to a close, the parishes had held their first session of sacramental preparation. Christina Callaghan, catechist at St. John the Baptist Parish says, "Our first Reconciliation session went very well. The stories and activities in the program book engaged the children. Many of them stayed for Mass and participated enthusiastically as Fr. Ervens quizzed them during the homily. As a mother, teacher and St. John's parishioner, it is wonderful to see home, school and parish come together to help these children come to know Christ and His Church more closely."

Sacramental preparation and the ritual to welcome the children preparing to receive the sacraments remind each parishioner of her/his own calling to pray for and support the children of their parishes. Sheri McNeil, Pastoral Assistant from St. Alphonsus Ligouri Parish emphasizes, "Just as

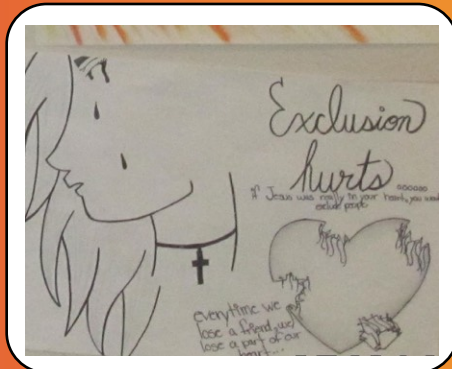
importantly, the entire faith community provides a loving place for the child to grow in his or her faith."

Bishop McGrattan is meeting with the city pastors and pastoral teams in December to check in to see how things are going and to continue sketching out plans for expansion next year. Fr. Bill Moloney says "my brother priests are interested in the city pilot program and they welcome a consistent approach". Plans are well under way for the 15-16 pilot followed by a two-fold plan for 16-17 to expand the pilot for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist and to begin a pilot sacramental preparation program for the sacrament of Confirmation.

Bishop McGrattan says, "The city parishes – pastors, catechists, parents and teachers – are working together in a coordinated way to support children preparing to receive the sacraments. Their efforts have met with positive and encouraging feedback. Our shared mission is to support the children as God draws them closer to Himself through the sacraments." ✠



## A Poster Contest in Powassan



CWL Education and Health convener, Patti Muileboom organized a poster contest at St. Gregory's School in Powassan on May 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The theme was 'Welcoming others to the Table' and was divided into 3 groups: JK to grade 3, grades 4 to 6 and grades 7 and 8.

There were approximately 180 posters entered with many interesting thoughts and pictures portrayed. The judges had a very difficult time choosing the 7 winners. "