

Diocese of Syracuse Faith Formation Study

Report to:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse

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Hezel Associates, LLC, is a custom research, evaluation, and strategic consulting firm specializing in education. Since 1987, Hezel Associates has embraced its mission to serve clients with *intelligence, experience, and insight to enable them to succeed in creating, managing, and improving education initiatives.*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents Hezel Associates findings to support reform efforts of faith formation practices across the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse (Diocese). Your desire to seek input from key stakeholders to turn their thoughts and ideas into actionable practices is commendable. Through our research, we believe we have identified strategies and practices to enable you to further enrich and empower parish communities across the Diocese, and collectively strengthen faith formation practices.

This report covers an extensive amount of data captured from the Diocese. With the depth and richness of the information provided, researchers were able to tease out key themes to support actionable steps on how the Diocese may choose to proceed. Any prospective changes will require sound leadership from the Diocese and clear communication about the necessity of moving together as one community.

We understand that irrespective of the depth of the study, as researchers, we do not claim to have the cultural or theological knowledge that must certainly drive the Diocese in a new direction. Our role in this study was to provide a fresh perspective and help reveal the key trends and practices occurring within the Diocese. We are happy to engage in further discussions to help guide the Diocese and work collaboratively to reform faith formation practices.

Study Background

Diocese staff provided documentation that has helped researchers understand the current challenges around faith formation in the Diocese, and what the national landscape looks like for the Catholic Church. The Diocese is not immune to some of the challenges facing the Catholic community. Like many Dioceses across the nation, Syracuse is witnessing declining participation in parish life, and Catholic life in general in terms of faith formation programming.

Research shows that of those who complete sacramental initiation, as many as 85% do not continue to practice their faith into adulthood (Gordon, 2008). Discussions with the Diocese of Syracuse staff alluded to significant decline in weekly Mass participation, as well as decline in enrollment in faith formation and sacramental preparation programs. Focus group findings also alluded to these trends, and the pressures they create for the parish.

Research and conversations prior to this study indicated that there are a variety of assumptions as to why these changes are occurring, including, but not limited to: competing cultural and secular demands and philosophies, inadequate catechesis, and a lack of conversion among the baptized. Local population decline may also be attributed to decreases in the Central New York region. These declines, along with fewer vocations to the priesthood, have resulted in the closing of some parishes. In an effort to meet the needs of those who continue to practice their faith, some parishes have merged, while others have adopted a pastoral care area (PCA) model.

Study Purpose

Given this background, the overarching purpose of the study is to provide information to guide Diocesan leadership in planning to meet the evangelization and catechetical needs of individuals and parishes, with a focus on aligning the role of the Office of Faith Formation to meet these needs. This research explored: (a) the current state of faith formation at the parish level, (b) ways

the Office of Faith Formation can best support parishes, and (c) current *promising practices* occurring within the Diocese. This study was designed to learn from stakeholders, and take a *bottom-up* approach to planning, by gathering input from those directly involved in delivering faith formation programs at parishes. The research questions for this study were:

- 1) What is the current status of catechesis/faith formation in the Diocese?
 - a. What programs are offered, how are they structured, what successes are there, and what challenges/areas of need exist?
- 2) How do parish Faith Formation leaders perceive the role of the Diocesan Office of Faith Formation?
 - a. What supports have parishes received?
 - b. How helpful have these supports been?
 - c. What outcomes have resulted from these supports?
 - d. What other services and supports are needed that might be provided?
- 3) What efforts and strategies are in place in parishes to promote evangelization and conversion?
 - a. What successes and challenges are there in relation to promoting evangelization at the parish level and within faith formation programming?
 - b. What role might the Office of Faith Formation play in supporting parishes in their efforts?

To address these research questions, data collection activities included two comprehensive faith formation questionnaires of Catechetical Leaders (CLs) and pastors, focus groups with CLs, follow up interviews with CLs, and a faith formation literature review to identify emerging practices.

Summary of Findings: Research Question 1

Research Question 1 (RQ1) explored the current status of catechesis/faith formation in the Diocese. Additionally, RQ1 examined the kinds of programs offered and successes/challenges encountered by faith formation leaders. Below is a synopsis of key findings.

Examination of the current status of faith formation in the Diocese

Overall, the data revealed that faith formation across the Diocese is undergoing a time of transition. With a well-respected leader retiring, and the position yet to be filled, many CLs and pastors shared they would like more input from the Diocese on the future of the office. The data revealed that CLs remain very committed to their ministry, and often make decisions based on what they believe is in the best interest of their parish. In addition, data indicated that pastors have tended to delegate much of the decision-making authority to CLs.

The data also revealed that throughout the Diocese, there is substantial experience related to faith formation among CLs. The data showed that 57% of CLs (n = 82) have been engaged in this ministry for *more than 10 years* (33%) or *5-10 years* (24%). In addition, when asked, *have you completed Foundational Certification in the last 10 years?*, 57% (n = 82) of CLs responded *yes*, and 43% *no*. The current state of the Diocese is that it has a very dedicated and committed group of individuals guiding faith formation at their parish. However, these individuals are looking for

additional support from the Diocese on new methods to engage individuals and clarity on Diocesan expectations regarding faith formation.

Parish needs dictate program models, delivery methods, and instructional techniques

Analysis of the CL Survey finds that faith formation leaders offer a variety of program models and delivery methods for faith formation. Programs vary in terms of target populations (e.g., school age children, young adults, adults/parents), delivery methods (e.g., textbooks, online, retreats), engagement levels among participants (e.g., families, parents, parish-wide involvement), and program structures (e.g., at-home, online, tied to mass schedules, days of week). Overall, one theme that emerged was that faith formation leaders believe that programs should be based on parish needs. Across all data sets, faith formation leaders spoke of the importance of being able to tailor their program to fit the needs of their parish community. In addition, many programs implemented a mix of models and delivery methods, all designed to best meet the needs of the parish.

Because of the customization in programming across parishes, several differences emerged in terms of program design and delivery. However, although differences do exist across regions and parishes, there were some common trends that analysis revealed, which help to paint a picture of what faith formation looks like across the Diocese.

The CL Survey indicated that 100% of CLs (n = 82) respondents offer a faith formation program for *Grades 1-6*. In addition, 98% of participants (n = 80) shared they have a program for *Grades 7-8*, and 91% of CLs noted they had a program for *Grades 9-10*. Further, 82% of CLs (n = 74) shared they have *separate sacramental preparation for First Penance/First Eucharist*. In addition, 5% of respondents (n = 4) reported having *family catechesis as their whole program*, and most parishes do not offer programming beyond 11th Grade (See Figure 1).

The data showed that CLs select a variety of materials to develop their curriculum and this results in varied models of instruction. The most common publishers were Pflaum, RCL Benzinger, and Loyola Press. However, many CLs commented in focus groups that they tend to mix resources to develop their curriculum, picking and choosing from chapters and activities they believe work best for their parish. These findings align with the CLs comments on the need to tailor curriculum and resources to fit the needs of the parish, and the resistance of CLs to standardize programming.

Throughout the Diocese, various assessment methods are being used in regard to faith formation programs. CLs reported using several methods to assess learning, such as quizzes, typically developed by the publisher, and observations of classroom conversations to assess student learning. CLs and pastors did not mention any requirements from the Diocese, and as such, data suggested that assessing learning is happening informally.

CLs believe that standardization should be implemented with caution, as materials need to be based on the needs of the parish. Finally, CLs believe that the Diocese could be more present in their communities. CLs believe that by being more present in their community (such as attending faith formation events or meetings) Diocese leadership will better understand their needs, and provide more targeted resources for support.

Catechetical Leaders believe positive relationships with Pastors are essential to program success
The CL survey revealed that mostly positive relationships with pastors exist. For example, when asked to what extent they agree with the statement, *I have a positive relationship with my pastor*, 97% (n = 76) of CLs shared they either *strongly agree* (61%) or *agree* (36%). Focus groups also revealed positive relationships with pastors, with only a few expressing concerns about working with pastors. Some CLs shared that their pastors were not as engaged in faith formation ministry as much as they would like. However, they believe that their absence in events is, “not due to any fault of his own,” explaining the many pressures that their priest faces managing a parish.

Overall, CLs believe that the pastor needs to be supportive of faith formation; in his actions and not words. “The pastor should be the lead evangelizer and faith formation leader. If the parish doesn't see his interest or energy devoted in this direction, it doesn't matter what programs you use or what the director does,” shared one CL. In addition, they spoke of the importance of providing engaging and enlightening homilies that “hook” parishioners and make them want to come back to the church each week.

Identifying successful practices for faith formation programs

Researchers also explored program successes. The data revealed that each parish has a different view on what success might look like for their community. Below, researchers briefly describe how success is typically measured beyond metrics, and how faith formation leaders have attempted many different strategies within their programs, often on limited budgets.

Faith formation leaders believe success is measured beyond metrics

When the CLs were asked in the focus group what success meant for their program, many commented that success certainly includes metrics such as more people attending church, more engaged communities, or increased enrollments. However, the overall theme was that success is measured beyond metrics. As the quotes below illustrate, success was defined in many different ways by CLs, extending beyond metrics. “Some are highly engaged and faith is part of their lives. I mean you're dealing with such a diverse [group]. So, your program is never going to be highly successful for everyone in your parish,” shared one CL. Another added, “It's not like an athletic program where you think that if you made it to the state finals you're a highly successful program. “I think for me success is seeing the smiles on the kid's face, seeing them get it,” another CL observed.

One CL's comments encompass the feelings of many, explaining how success needs to be measured beyond just numbers. “Excuse my language, but forget those numbers. Because anybody can lead a herd of sheep. You get somebody who sits next to you and needs your help, needs to see the love and the compassion of Christ, that's success.”

Catechetical Leaders have attempted to implement new strategies into programming

Many CLs spoke about their programs as trying new concepts (like on-line, at-home), building family ministry programs, developing peer groups, conducting additional retreats, and increasing efforts to recruit and retain volunteers.

Exploring the current challenges for faith formation

This study revealed that faith formation leaders face many complicated challenges. Many of the challenges extend beyond faith formation programs, and are challenges faced by the entire parish. Many CLs commented that they often feel “blamed” for larger parish level problems, such as decreased weekly mass attendance. Below, the common challenges that emerged are identified.

Catechetical Leaders desire more staff and volunteers to run programs

Each parish has taken on various methods (e.g., full-time, part-time, or volunteers) on how to staff positions for faith formation. The CL survey found that most individuals reported that they *were part-time paid staff* (52%, n = 80), followed by *full-time paid staff* (33%).

When asked if they believe they have enough time to run their programs, 65% responded *yes* (n = 81). However, the qualitative data showed that some CLs need more support for their programs, in terms of staff or volunteers. As one CL shared:

“Years ago, in my parish, faith formation was a full-time position, and there was a youth director and pastoral associate. They were all full-time people. Now there’s me, and I’m supposed to work 25 hours a week. There’s a confirmation coordinator who’s supposed to work 15 or 10. There are people who we beg to do things. So, if faith formation is something the Diocese cares about, then they need to get their wallet out, and make it a priority.”

The data suggested that CLs believe that with more resources, including more volunteer or paid support, they will be able to more effectively implement faith formation programs.

Parents are essential to guide a child’s faith formation journey, but their engagement is lacking

CLs and pastors were concerned about the engagement of parents in their child’s development of faith and believe that having more active parents in the faith community will increase student participation. However, CLs and pastors understood the demands on family life, the multiple obligations with extra-curricular activities, and in particular, athletic commitments. CLs felt like they are competing with athletics; as games are often held on Sunday. They commented that this presents another obstacle for student engagement and forces parents to balance commitments.

To help work through this challenge, some parishes have adopted a more family-centric approach to faith formation. The data revealed that for many parishes, family faith formation seems to be a new type of offering, as 48% of CLs shared they have offered family faith formation for 1-3 years (35%) and less than one year (13%). Those with more mature programs have found success in their efforts, with examples of inviting parents to classes, teaching parents and children jointly, offering in-home resources, and conducting more family events at the church. Yet, the majority of CLs seem to struggle to engage parents and families in their faith formation programs. Newer programs are still in need of “selling” the concept to their faith community. The data also suggested that engagement of families is mostly centered around sacramental prep.

Linked parishes present a unique set of challenges for faith formation programs

The data suggested that linked parishes have a unique set of challenges. One is related to pastor availability, since quite often the pastor is being pulled in various directions and does not have time to spend with children during faith formation classes. CLs shared that often their pastor will lead Mass at one church, and then have to immediately leave to get to the next Mass at the linked parish. Because of this, they cannot spend time with children in faith formation classes, making it difficult for the students to ever meet or engage with the parish pastor.

The data also suggested additional challenges for linked parishes, such as which parish would administer faith formation programs, or if it would be a joint effort (collaborative program or separate programs at each parish). Some CLs expressed frustration because they felt like they were competing against themselves. They felt that some parishes would offer different programming to attract students, and parents would end up “shopping” for the program they liked the most.

Youth ministry and faith formation may not be collaborating effectively at the parish level

This study found that most CLs believe there is low engagement in their parish for youth ministry. For some CLs and pastors, they view youth ministry and faith formation as one-in-the-same. In addition, CLs believe their parishes could improve how they offer faith formation for adolescents and young adults. When asked to what extent they agreed with the statement *my parish offers faith formation for adolescents and young adults on how to share their faith with others in college and in the workplace*, 38% disagree with the statement, and another 4% strongly disagree (See Figure 23). Finally, when CLs were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement, *I would like more information on how to engage youth and young people in my parish*, 54% agree and 30% strongly agree.

Many parishes have adopted innovative approaches to address parish-level challenges

Parishes have sought innovative ways to develop faith formation programming. These practices are varied by nature but have provided some ideas on how to move forward. CLs in the North have partnered with various community groups and take a very relational approach to their ministry. Northern CLs encourage attendance of “faith-filled” opportunities, such as trips and youth rallies. In the South, some CLs offer “coaching” sessions to parents, so they will be better equipped to teach and guide their children. The Eastern Region offers activities such as Bible Study to engage parents and adults in their faith. Eastern Region CLs also commented on offering service opportunities for parents, children, and families. In addition, CLs in the Eastern Region have experimented with different ways to engage parents, such as inviting them to youth group activities and Confirmation Retreats. They also offer intergenerational events, donuts after masses, and family catechesis options. In the Western Region, some CLs have used a “Mass Journal” for students to reflect on what they learned during the weekend liturgy. Like other regions, the Western Region also promotes service activities. At one parish, once a month they host a “family faith formation evening,” in which all grades host an evening of prayer and invite speakers.

Throughout all regions, CLs and pastors alluded to the idea that they need to tailor their programs to fit needs, and ultimately desire the Diocese to help provide solutions, either from national trends or other models. They were apprehensive about any standard, one-size-fits-all

model, and did not view that as a solution to their challenges, or as an innovative approach moving forward.

Overall, RQ1 explored the current state of faith formation, the programs offered, successes, and challenges. The data suggested that parishes have adopted models and structures that they believe best suit their parish. As such, there are a variety of delivery and instructional methods in use throughout the Diocese. With these multiple methods, a variety of assessment practices are in place, however most come from the publisher of the curriculum used. The data also revealed how challenging the ministry is to lead. With families faced with competing interests, faith formation leaders believe their programs are pushed aside for other family priorities. However, CLs have adopted a variety of strategies to try and improve engagement, but would still like to see more support from the Diocese on emerging models.

Findings: Research Question 2

In order to provide recommendations to the Diocese on how to improve support to parishes, researchers investigated the current faith formation leaders' perceptions of the Diocesan Office of Faith Formation, with regard to support received, helpfulness of support, outcomes and needs. Below, a brief overview of findings for Research Question 2 are provided.

Perceptions of the role of the Office of Faith Formation

CLs perceptions of the role of the Office of Faith Formation varied. Perceptions included individuals sharing they wanted to see the office shut down, to others worrying that absent an Office of Faith Formation, CLs would lose their voice in the Diocese. In particular, the Northern Region had very little to say about the Office of Faith Formation, because many believe the office does not support their interests. As one pastor shared, "These are mostly negative answers because we have no representation from the Office in our region."

On the other hand, many CLs commented that without the support they received from the Office of Faith Formation, they would no longer be involved in faith formation ministry. Supports included everything from designing curriculum to allowing a safe-space to voice concerns and collaboratively work through issues.

Ultimately, the data suggested that there is some confusion on the role of the Office of Faith Formation among CLs and pastors. Some believe that the office needs more authority to actually enforce standards and explain them to parishes. Although the perceptions of the office seem to be mixed, generally, the data suggests positive experiences around support received.

Support, helpfulness, and outcomes received by parishes

Analysis revealed various forms of support the Diocese is providing. Some of the support is more formal than others. When CLs were asked to share their perceptions of how helpful the various kinds of support received by the Office of Faith Formation were, most believed that they were *helpful* or *very helpful* (See Figure 72). For instance, when asked how helpful the Diocese has been *providing information on effective catechetical models*, 87% responded *very helpful* (56%) or *helpful* (31%). In addition, the same series of questions were asked on how important

each service provided was. Overall, most respondents found the services to be *very important*, with little variation in the data.

Some of the supports CLs identified were catechist training, CL professional development, Office of Faith Formation website, parish supports, and regional meetings. Findings are briefly shared below.

Faith formation leaders worry that certification requirements for catechists are too burdensome
When CLs were asked if they were aware of Diocesan training for catechists (i.e., Heart of the Catechist, Echoes of Faith), overwhelming the CLs responded with *yes* (96%, n = 72), see Table 41. However, when CLs were asked if they had participated in this training, the responses were mixed, as 54% said *yes*, and 46% responded *no* (n = 72, See Table 42). In terms of catechist training, the data suggested that CLs are already feeling pressure to recruit and retain volunteers, so there is hesitancy by CLs to push catechists towards certification. They believe that their catechists are already donating a lot of time, and that certification may be an unnecessary burden to impose.

Although CLs worry training is too burdensome, data suggests they believe the training is very helpful. The survey also asked, *how helpful has the Diocese been in providing appropriate training for catechists*, 73% responded *very helpful* (n = 70), another 21% *somewhat helpful*, and just 6% *not helpful*. Further, when asked, *how helpful has the Diocese been in providing effective opportunities for ongoing spiritual formation for catechists*, 55% said *very helpful* (n = 71), 37% *somewhat helpful*, and 8% *not helpful* (See Figure 74).

Additional professional development to catechetical leaders may help support their ministry
Overall, the CLs feel supported by the Diocese. Evidence suggested that more support for long-term growth and training could be helpful for the CLs. Sharing of more resources and practices could be another way to support CLs in their ministry.

Data suggests that CLs seemed to find the various professional development opportunities as *very helpful* (See Figure 76). For instance, 71% of CLs shared *that providing opportunities for catechetical leaders to share their thoughts and ideas were very helpful* (n = 70). Further, 72% said Diocese support was *very helpful* when *providing appropriate training for catechetical leaders* (n = 69).

The Office of Faith Formation website is one of multiple methods to share resources
Data suggests most individuals are accessing the website *monthly* (28%, n = 75). The remaining CLs indicated they access the website *less than once per month* (25%) or *either weekly* or *I do not use the website* (both 17%), see Figure 69. Most individuals are using the website to *learn about upcoming formation and training opportunities* (42%, n = 55) or to *locate catechetical resources* (40%, see Table 47). Further, most individuals responded positively to the website, as only 15% referred to the website as *not helpful* (n = 62, See Table 48). Common trends were that individuals use the website to find materials and events. However, during focus groups many expressed that they do not use the website because of time, computer skills, and do not find it useful to support their ministry. As such, the Diocese should keep in mind that there are multiple

ways to disseminate information to reach the broadest audience (e.g., email, phone, mail, in-person).

Faith formation leaders are generally satisfied with support received by the Diocese

When asked if the *Office of Faith Formation provides valuable services to my ministry*, 50% *strongly agree* and another 33% *agree* (n = 70). Further, most CLs *strongly agree* (47%) or *agree* (39%) that the Office of Faith Formation has helped to *provide faith formation opportunities to meet the needs of my parish* (n = 70). Further, most individuals cited they have a positive relationship with the Office of Faith Formation, and overwhelmingly, they are satisfied with the support they receive from the Office of Faith Formation. Finally, most CLs believe the Office of Faith Formation is responsive to their questions and concerns (See Figure 70).

When CLs were asked about Diocese *support for promoting family catechesis* (n = 57), most individuals selected *somewhat helpful* (49%), followed closely by *very helpful* (42%). When asked about the Diocese *support for implementing family catechesis models* (n = 49), 45% of CLs shared the support was *somewhat helpful*, and another 39% cited *very helpful*. When asked about Diocese support for *supporting and assisting catechetical leaders with family outreach* (n = 56), 41% shared the support is *very helpful*, and another 39% commented *somewhat helpful*.

Although these findings present a mostly positive picture of support provided by the Office of Faith Formation, the survey did present areas for growth. For example, the survey suggests that CLs would like more information on how to engage with youth, reach parents, and incorporate family faith formation into the parish (See Figure 71).

Catechetical Leaders believe that reforms to regional meetings may better support their ministry

Across all data sources, there were mixed feelings about the usefulness of regional meetings. The CL Survey suggests that 49% (n = 77) of individuals *attend almost all meetings* and 17% *attend about half of the meetings*. Further, 22% of individuals shared *they do not attend the meetings*, and 12% commented *they attend less than half* (See Figure 49).

Further, when asked, *how helpful are these meetings to your ministry?* most CLs shared they are *very helpful* (60%, n = 60), see Figure 50. However, the focus groups presented an alternative view. Focus groups and open-ended responses from the survey indicated that some individuals felt the meetings would often turn into “gripe sessions,” and not be useful to them in their ministry.. The common findings as to why individuals do not attend were: (a) time (b) distance (c) perceived value and (d) viewed as “gripe” sessions.

Detailing additional areas of support for faith formation

This research revealed numerous areas of need and support for faith formation leaders across the Diocese, including (a) providing CLs a voice in the Office of Faith Formation, (b) improving communications and collaboration with CLs throughout the Diocese (c) balancing parish autonomy and Diocesan standards (d) developing trust through relationship building with Northern Region CLs, and (d) identifying effective models related to family and relational ministry. These are briefly explored below.

Providing Catechetical Leaders a voice in the Office of Faith Formation

Many of the CLs commented on the need to hire a leader for the Office of Faith Formation. They spoke very highly of previous leadership. CLs fear that without a leader, the Office of Faith Formation will ultimately go away and be rolled into either youth ministry or evangelization. However, some insights from the pastor survey provided a more nuanced view of the role of the Office of Faith Formation. Their perspectives tended to be able to look more globally at the role of the Office of Faith Formation, and how it may support their parish needs. One pastor shared:

Faith Formation Ministry is not responsible for everything. It needs to be integrated into the overall life and ministry of the parish. Example. When faith formation is expected to do catechesis, service, evangelization and liturgy, other ministry leaders have a difficult time making their contribution. Faith formation in my opinion is an important component of parish ministry but so is evangelization, youth ministry, etc. We have to stop giving the faith formation and/or leaders the impression that they do it all. They must work together with the other ministries as partners, and if they do the outcome will be closer to the goals that we espouse.”

One pastor stated, “It’s time to abandon this office.” Other pastors discussed the need to collaborate with other ministries in the region. As such, the data revealed that some leadership needs to be in place for faith formation. The leadership may not rest in an Office of Faith Formation, but the position can still be valuable to support leaders across the Diocese.

Improving communications and collaboration with CLs throughout the Diocese

The data also revealed that communication and collaboration could improve across the Diocese. Many CLs discussed how “it was a shame” to see the resource centers close across the Diocese. These used to be places where people would collaborate and share information about faith formation. CLs often complained about competing guidelines for sacraments, and a lack of enforcement if some parishes go against Diocese standards. Many individuals commented that absent any leadership, they are not sure who to ask questions too, and it’s hard to get an answer from anyone at the Diocese. CLs in the North cited difficulty on knowing who to contact with questions and concerns they have about programming and Diocese standards.

Balancing parish autonomy with Diocesan standards

Many individuals believe that as the CL, they understand the parish and its needs the best. On the other hand, they also want consistency in communication from the Diocese on sacramental requirements (as in age of Confirmation). Pastors shared similar feelings. One shared, “Each parish determines the style that suits the community best.” Another added, “The future of the faith formation office is completely dependent on the person's ability to lead and relate to other parish leaders.”

Developing trust through relationship building with Northern Region Catechetical Leaders

Of all the regions, the Northern Region’s relationship with the OFF seems to need the most improvement. The Northern Region CLs also commented that they feel like they are left out from Diocesan practices. As such, the Diocese can work to improve their relationships by being proactive in communication and being present in Northern Region events.

Identifying effective models related to youth, family, and parent engagement

Overall, CLs and Pastors seem to be happy with the support services they have received. Across each region, CLs and Pastors are generally satisfied with the kinds of services they have received. Focus group data was generally the same. However, the data suggest that CLs would like more support on family and relational ministry. In addition, more support for how to engage youth and families in faith formation activities is another area of need expressed by CLs.

RQ2 discussed the perceived role of the Office of Faith Formation and explored various supports faith formation leaders have received. The findings showed that there is a lack of understanding of the role of the Office of Faith Formation, and that individuals struggle to know where to go to get answers for faith formation questions. Overall, the CLs seemed to be satisfied with support received. However, the Northern Region, in both Focus Groups and surveys, shared they feel left out and abandoned by the office. As a result, they have taken initiative to develop their own regional meetings and build a community in the Northern Region among faith formation leaders.

Findings: Research Question 3

Research Question 3 served to examine evangelization practices across the Diocese. When analyzing the data across each region, several trends emerged, highlighted below.

Efforts and strategies to promote evangelization and conversion

Nearly all CLs were aware of the Diocesan mission of evangelization (See Table 97), as 99% (n = 65) of respondents indicated they were aware of the Diocesan mission of evangelization. Similarly, during the focus groups, all leaders had a sense of the Diocesan mission of evangelization. However, 60% of CLs selected *no* when asked if their parish has an Evangelization Ministry (See Table 98).

Success and challenges for promoting evangelization

When asked if their parish offers *small group evangelization/formation opportunities*, 54% of CLs (n = 70) *agree* and another 23% *strongly agree* these offerings exist at their parish. Further, when asked if their parish *offers opportunity for prayer and devotion*, 53% *agree*, and another 42% of CLs (n = 76) *strongly agree*. When asked, *does your parish promote a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and evangelization?*, 57% *agree*, and another 31% *strongly agree* (n = 75). Finally, when asked if their parish *provides opportunities for practicing Catholics to renew and experience continual conversion*, 52% of CLs (n = 75) *agree*, and another 25% *strongly agree*. See Figure 81.

Efforts to promote evangelization tend to vary across the Diocese.

Overall, some regions have developed evangelization ministries while others seem to be floundering on how to best implement at their parish. As discussed earlier, faith formation programs tend to be customized and tailored towards specific needs of the faith community. Findings related to evangelization suggest a similar theme. Data suggests that CLs perceive evangelization and faith formation as the same ministry, and there is not a common language that distinguishes the differences in these two ministries. CLs and pastors shared that challenges with evangelization that emerged were largely related to time, funding, and staff to run programs.

Role of the Office of Faith Formation

Data suggests that across the Diocese, CLs are aware of the importance of evangelization, but are struggling to create a ministry or support activities. Overall, the faith formation leaders desire more support to understand what evangelization looks like at the parish level. CLs seem to see evangelization and faith formation as very similar ministries and are looking for more guidance from the Diocese on the differences. Nearly all faith formation leaders are aware of the Diocesan mission of evangelization, yet very few have a dedicated team or individual leading the ministry.

Provide more support to develop common understandings of evangelization

The Office of Faith Formation could play a very important role in the development of common understandings of evangelization, and how faith formation builds on its role in the Diocese. Faith formation leaders tended to be worried that evangelization will replace faith formation. As one individual shared from the Northern Region: “we don’t have a Faith Formation Director in the diocese anymore. I do not want to get swallowed up by the Youth Ministry Office or evangelization office.”

RQ3 explored evangelization practices across the Diocese. The findings showed that many parishes have yet to adopt an evangelization ministry. Many CLs shared they are not sure how evangelization and their ministry differ. The data suggest that parishes may not have enough staff support for an individual to lead evangelization, and in some cases, those responsibilities fall to the CL at the parish.

This concludes an overview of findings for the research questions. More thorough reporting on findings are found throughout the report. Each section is disaggregated by region. The next section provides recommendations on how to move forward as a united community.

Recommendations and Proposed Further Actions

Based on the findings of this report, below are recommendations the Diocese may consider. These recommendations are designed to elicit further discussions within the Diocese on how to move forward.

Empower the Catechetical Leader by giving them a voice in changes

Overall, the CL serves a critical role at the parish level. In many respects, the CL is on the front-lines of faith formation. As the data show, the CLs in the Diocese hold a tremendous wealth of knowledge about their parish and how to run faith formation programs. In order to move forward, their voices must be heard in any changes, and be part of any transformation the Office of Faith Formation may undergo. The Diocese should consider proactively engaging these leaders in the decision-making process, by having them serve on a committee, or continue to solicit feedback on proposed changes. The CLs should be active participants in any changes made, and the Diocese should make sure there is agreement on how to move forward.

Provide Catechetical Leaders with on-going professional development opportunities

In addition, the Diocese should consider offering continuing education programs or opportunities for CLs. These activities will help expose the CLs to emerging models and encourage collaboration by sharing what CLs have learned at events or trainings.

Avoid the one-size-fits-all model as a faith formation delivery method

Many CLs and pastors spoke with caution about the one-size-fits-all model for faith formation. The data shows there is hesitancy about this kind of orientation. Although some standardization may be necessary, the faith formation leaders desire some degree of autonomy in developing and designing curriculum for their parish. Moving forward, the Diocese will have to balance parish autonomy and the needs of the Diocese.

Identify opportunities to attend faith formation gatherings across the Diocese

In the Southern, Northern, and Eastern regions, many CLs discussed the desire for Diocese leadership to be more present at events. They felt that if leadership was “in the trenches” they would be able to offer better support and build positive relationships with the Diocese. As such, the Diocese should seek ways to understand when events occur and identify ways for the Diocese to have representation at the events.

Begin efforts to restructure the Office of Faith Formation

One of the findings of this study is that a restructuring of the Office of Faith Formation is likely necessary. Many of the CLs worry that their voices will be lost in any restructuring efforts. However, this study shows that there is opportunity to restructure the office, as CLs voiced a clear need to fill the Director of Faith Formation position. An analysis of other faith formation offices from across the country showed that many Dioceses have merged their faith formation, evangelization, and youth ministry into one ministry. Other dioceses have kept the ministries all separate. There are multiple options to consider on how to best move forward. The Diocese may consider (a) developing a new office that encompasses youth, evangelization, and faith formation (b) hiring a director to lead the existing Office of Faith Formation (c) removing the Office of Faith Formation completely and delegating responsibilities to existing staff. For researchers, it is difficult to make a sound recommendation absent additional data (such as financial restrictions, Diocese vision moving forward, and existing strategies).

Define the mission, vision, goals of youth ministry, faith formation, and evangelization

Throughout this study, data suggests that these three ministries have complementary goals and objectives, yet are misaligned in terms of resource allocation (staffing, funding, services provided) or have vacancies in leadership positions. Many CLs would refer to youth ministry, faith formation, and evangelization, as the same ministry. In some cases, the CL was running each of these ministries, or small events for each one. This study cannot recommend a strong data-based solution on next steps to restructure the office (as noted above). But the data reveals that the Diocese should revise the mission, vision, and goals of youth, faith formation, and evangelization ministries. By identifying areas where these ministries align and intersect, the appropriate way to restructure these offices may start to emerge, especially if CLs, and those running these ministries, are engaged in the process.

Reform regional meetings to better serve needs of Catechetical Leaders

Regional meetings produce mixed results, both in terms of attendance and CL perceptions of usefulness. The data showed that for the CLs who attend these meetings, they enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate and share resources with their peers. Clear agendas and discussion points should be available in advance for these meetings. In addition, many commented that

these meetings are at times that are inconvenient, either too late in the evening, or conflict with their work schedule.

Offer multiple ways to participate in regional meetings

The Diocese should look to create ways to make it easier for individuals to attend regional meetings. This could be accomplished by either using video, recording sessions, or different mediums to help encourage remote participation. Since many of the CLs work part-time and have other commitments, the timing of the meetings seems to be an issue. The Diocese should offer adequate notice of when meetings are and offer them at different times, in an attempt to meet the needs of all CLs.

Renew partnerships with Northern Region leadership through relationship building

In the North, CLs have taken on creating their own meetings to network, learn, and share with one another. The Diocese could be present at those gatherings, and to learn ways to best support them in their ministry. This will require the Diocese to be more present in the Northern region and build relationships with the CLs. Further, the Diocese should list the North as a faith formation region, since all the other regions are present on the Diocesan website.

Investigate the pilot program more thoroughly

Ultimately, the pilot program was not investigated thoroughly in this study. There was low participation from pilot parish members, but a more thorough study of pilot parishes may be warranted. Since the sample size of pilot parishes was so small, many feared being identified, and did not want to participate in the study, or in a very limited capacity (non-recorded phone call, and preference that no quotes appear in the study). However, the Pilot Program offers a new way to deliver faith formation, and an additional study will help understand how to potentially scale the program.

Provide models to Catechetical Leaders to improve engaging youth and families in parish life

Many of the CLs desire to learn more about innovative ways to engage youth and families in parish life. The Diocese should leverage resources to identify trends, practices, and methods used nationally. In addition, this information should be disseminated to all the parishes as a way to support their efforts.

Conduct assessments of parents and families at parishes

The Diocese should consider developing a brief survey, standardized across all parishes, to assess parent engagement and their needs. This survey could help bring to light more parish needs and engage parents in efforts to reform faith formation across the Diocese. Sponsored by the Diocese, this survey could also be a way for the Diocese to support each parish and provide valuable intelligence on how to design and craft faith formation programs, allowing each parish to customize programs to fit community needs.

Throughout this study, it was evident about the passion that individuals have for their ministry. In addition, the data revealed the important role that faith formation serves within a parish, as it serves an essential role to helping individuals grow in their faith, and become more engaged in the parish community. As one CL stated, “We need to keep the positive and encouraging words for these families that are trying to find their way home.”

When reading through this report, consider immersing yourself in the role of a CL at the parish. This exercise will help to see new perspectives and understand the richness of the data in this report. Throughout the interview process and reviewing data, the passion and commitment that Catechetical Leaders bring to their ministry was inspiring. In many regards, they are out on the front lines for their parishes, working hard to develop relationships with parishioners and live their lives guided by their faith. Their efforts and commitment should not go unnoticed, and their passion for their ministry should be a positive example across the many functions of the Church.