



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

INSTITUTE FOR CATHOLIC FORMATION • 238 JEWETT AVENUE • BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT 06606-2892
203-416-1657 • www.formationreimagined.org

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Pastors and Ministry Leaders
FROM: Patrick Donovan
DATE: September 17, 2021
RE: The Institute for Catholic Formation

As you may have read in the Fairfield County Catholic, Bishop Caggiano has rebranded The Leadership Institute. The new name, the **Institute for Catholic Formation**, reflects a broader perspective and more accurately identifies the many formation opportunities the Institute offers the faithful of the Diocese of Bridgeport. The Leadership Institute – with the help of ministry leaders in the diocese – has matured in the last five or so years and this change reflects the next chapter in our shared efforts.

The website – <https://formationreimagined.org> – stays the same, as does our logo. Over the next few weeks, you will see the website being refreshed and new great resources being added. In addition, you will notice that our social media presence will increase with an intentional effort to create opportunities for formation via Twitter and Instagram.

I have attached the article from the FCC in case you missed it. If you have any questions about the change, please do not hesitate to email Patrick Donovan at pdonovan@diobpt.org.

Peace.



The Institute for Catholic Formation

Bishop re-imagines the Leadership Institute

The Leadership Institute, founded out of the fourth general synod, has spent the last five years encouraging parish leaders and faith formation coordinators to reimagine formation.

Now, it seems, those who reimagine are, themselves, being reimagined.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has announced plans to rename The Leadership Institute as The Institute for Catholic Formation, effective September 19, 2021. The date coincides with the national celebration of Catechetical Sunday, which will be celebrated in parishes across the country.

"This change celebrates the growth of the original ideas on which The Leadership Institute was founded," the bishop said. "Namely, the establishment of a school without a wall that would encourage parish ministry leaders to participate in life-long formation. Since its inception, the Institute has become much more than that. This name recognizes that accomplishment and more clearly defines the role of the Institute."

In addition, the name change will help the faithful understand the role of the Institute in their own faith development. "Catholic formation" is a more appropriate title for all that the Institute accomplishes.

Initially funded by a single donor's commitment, the Institute has grown in its breadth and depth, from its original outreach to ministry leaders and pastors to all the faithful. As other institutes are formed in the diocese, The Institute for Catholic Formation will focus on the myriad of formation opportunities to catechists, parents, Catholic school teachers, liturgical ministers, couples wishing to get married, and more.

The logo and website will be retained from The Leadership Institute.

Lifelong Formation

When the Institute was founded, a concerted effort was made to avoid formation programs that had a beginning and an end. In the early days, Institute staff looked at more than 50 dioceses around the country to see how leaders were being formed. The team doing the research conclud-

ed that any program that had stages of formation (level one, level two, etc.) should be avoided, as should programs that ended in certificates, giving the impression that a person's formation was complete.

Instead, *An Invitation to Lifelong Formation* was published in 2017, calling on all parishes to use the indicators and recommendations to envision the day when formation in a parish was not done in stages (usually tied to sacraments), rather a lifelong process, engaging the faithful in the life, mission and ministry of the parish.

Those indicators and recommendations will be updated as the Institute expands to make sure they consider the new context of faith formation in a post-pandemic Church.

A Larger Audience

When it started, The Leadership Institute's primary audience included those who led parish ministries. Today, that audience includes just about everyone. Current resources include:

- Online courses for Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and Musicians
- Formation for catechists and Catholic school teachers
- Marriage formation for engaged couples
- Post-marriage opportunities for couples seeking to grow in their faith
- Resources for families, especially parents of young children
- Online videos, quizzes, and emails for faith formation leaders and those they teach
- Parish-based formation opportunities, such as reading groups and webinars
- Under its new name, resources will expand to include:
- A podcast by parents for parent, offering tips for raising faith-filled children
- Resources and text alerts specific to parents
- Intentional outreach to young adults
- Working with pilot parishes for improving communications
- Accompanying parishes as they reimagine ministry to middle school and high school
- Creating post-Confirmation

- opportunities for young people
- Overseeing the Ambassador program as part of the diocesan year of renewal
- Assisting parishes who wish to establish or improve their bereavement ministry

Additional projects, like The Family Bible Challenge, which offers families weekly reflections and quizzes for four six-week seasons each year, and The Face of Prayer, which includes daily prayers sent each afternoon via text, will continue to be managed by the rebranded Institute. The Family Bible Challenge, which began from a grant from the John Paul II Fund for religious education and youth ministry, has now been adopted by nearly a dozen other dioceses and includes more than 15,000 families.

The Face of Prayer, founded by Bishop Caggiano in 2017, has sent more than nine million prayers since its inception. Subscribers come from eleven countries and number more than 10,000 each day.

LEAD

In 2017, The Leadership Institute launched LEAD, an online learning platform designed to help participants complete formation online. After testing dozens of pre-packaged solutions and surveying more than 100 participants, the decision was made to create our own, proprietary system, which launched in 2019. The new platform, created from the ground up, is now used by several other dioceses and national organizations around the country and has become increasingly popular with diocesan offices looking for more creative ways to engage learners. It was especially helpful during the pandemic, when programs like marriage formation needed to shift from face-to-face formation to online.

In the 2021-2022 pastoral year, participants will see even more changes to LEAD. The LEAD Academy will launch in the coming months, allowing participants to choose from among dozens of courses to complete required formation. While core courses will still be required, participants can choose from electives or from formation opportunities they

participate in at the parish to earn credits needed to continue in ministry. In addition, parishes can offer their own formation opportunities and have those count towards required credits.

Staffing

Since 2016, The Leadership Institute has been led by Patrick Donovan. Though Donovan will continue in his role as executive director, more staff will be added in the coming months to assist with the broader scope of The Institute for Catholic Formation.

"I am very grateful to Patrick for his leadership and his enthusiasm in getting the Institute off the ground," the bishop said. "Given the budget-tightening that happened during the pandemic, we are now in a position to hire the staff required to continue the efforts Patrick began."

This year, two new team members will be added: an office administrator, who will serve as an executive secretary to Patrick Donovan and help manage the Institute, and a coordinator of young adult outreach, whose primary responsibility will be to help parishes engage young adults.

"The most disengaged population, according to Springtide Institute, is the age group 18-40," Donovan said. "We have to do all we can to help parishes reach out to this community and stem the tide of disaffiliation. This position will focus solely on young adults."

"Down the road, I would love to find funding to hire someone specific for family ministry," Donovan added, noting that nearly every faith formation study indicates the need for early childhood formation, which is, in large part, formation for parents.

A New Context

When Bishop Caggiano met with faith formation leaders and pastors on August 25, 2021 for a Catechetical Summit, he discussed the next challenge we face as ministry leaders.

"From the early days of the Baltimore Catechism to post-Vatican II and now to a post-pandemic Church, the content of the faith has remained the same," he told participants. "The context, however, has changed."

When children were mem-

orizing from the Baltimore Catechism, they were supported by families and communities of faith that shared the same values as those being taught in the schools and parishes. Family life has changed.

In a post-Vatican II Church, our experience of pastoral leadership and community life has changed, the bishop noted. Certainly, with the advent of hand-held technology, when suddenly everyone had a camera, phone, and computer in their hands, our experience of virtue has shifted.

The new context for faith formation requires us to reimagine how we reach the faithful in new and engaging ways. "This is a critical moment for us as a Church," the bishop said. "Working together with this rebranded, expanded Institute, we can use this moment to improve the ways we engage the faithful... but only if we work together."

"We are standing on the edge of something very exciting and I will not lose this moment to history," the bishop told the crowd of about 100 leaders. "It is simply too important to our future."

To Learn More

The Institute for Catholic Formation can be found online at www.formationreimagined.org or be reached via email at institute@diobpt.org.

About Catechetical Sunday

Catechetical Sunday is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the role that each person plays, by virtue of Baptism, in handing on the faith and being a witness to the Gospel. This year, the Church will celebrate Catechetical Sunday on September 19, 2021, and the theme is: "Say the Word and My Soul Shall be Healed." Those who the parish community has designated to serve as catechists will be called forth to be commissioned for their ministry.

(For more information and resources, see: www.usccb.org/committees/evangelization-catechesis/leadership-institute-catechetical-sunday-2021.)