

***The One: Pastoral Revitalization towards Eucharistic Renewal***

**LEADING CHANGE: INTEGRATING THE ONE INTO PARISH FAITH FORMATION  
FALL 2024**

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**INTRODUCTION**

An essential part of the work of *The One* is the need for parish faith formation to be reimagined as part of a larger process of evangelization. Given the fact that we live in a secular world, we can no longer presume that those who come to us seeking formation understand or seek personal discipleship with Christ. We must reorient our work to explore the deeper dimensions of a living relationship with the Lord, in and through His Church, for those entrusted to our catechetical care.

To meet this new challenge, all those in leadership in the Church, especially those who lead the work of catechesis and evangelization in all its forms, must examine current opportunities for faith formation and integrate new and creative opportunities that offer innovative ways to facilitate encounters with the person of Jesus Christ and avenues for those seeking a stronger faith to be accompanied by others on the journey.

In September 2023, Bishop Caggiano invited catechetical leaders to rebuild the airport while keeping the planes in the air.

Leading Change is your guide to accomplish this complex construction project.

## GUARDRAILS

Imagine you're driving on a winding mountain road. The road is beautiful but dangerous, with sharp turns and steep drop-offs. Along the edges of the road, there are strong metal guardrails in place. These guardrails don't restrict you from driving freely, but they ensure that, no matter what happens, you don't veer off the road and plunge into a dangerous situation. They provide a boundary for your safety while allowing you to continue your journey.

In faith formation, guardrails function the same way. They represent the non-negotiable ideas or principles that keep us aligned with our core values and mission. These are the essential boundaries that guide decisions, behaviors, and strategies. Just like the guardrails on the road, they don't limit creativity or innovation, but they prevent us from straying too far from our purpose or compromising on our foundational beliefs.

In short, these guardrails are for the methodology of evangelizing catechesis. They help maintain focus and protect us from going off course, allowing flexibility within the boundaries of our essential call to share the Good News.

1. **Parents and the family** are essential to passing on the faith: Parents as first witnesses and the family as the incubator where faith is nurtured. Activities, workshops, and opportunities for parents and, indeed, the whole family are to be part of the parish calendar.
2. The **transcendentals** have a vital role to play in formation. Encounters with beauty, an introduction of virtuous living, and opportunities for sharing the Truth are to be woven through the fabric of faith formation.
3. **Liturgical experiences** that engage the heart and mind, with music that lifts the faithful and inspires participants is paramount to connecting Sunday Mass with everyday life.
4. **Sacramental formation** includes short-term, immediate prep that welcomes parents and young people. It is distinct and separate from ongoing proximate formation.
5. Collaboration with the modern world demands a **flexible and open invitation**, a spirit of hospitality and welcome. This invitation to join the faith, learn more about the faith, or simply continue in formation requires a generosity of spirit and willingness to consider the needs of the faithful.
6. The Church must engage with the **digital world** as part of its mission to proclaim the Gospel. Catechesis must adapt to digital languages and tools to communicate the message of faith effectively.
7. Intentional efforts should be made to accompany those who are in **crisis**, are suffering loss, or need emotional support in the parish.

## LEADING CHANGE

There are eight steps to Leading Change. To influence change, you must 1) increase awareness and 2) change attitudes. This will 3) drive action. Rarely is a person good at all three of these tasks, so a team is essential.

1. Establishing a sense of Awareness  
Examine the current reality of the pastoral situation and identify crises, potential crises, or major opportunities for growth.
2. Creating the Guiding/Coalition Team  
Put together a group with enough power to lead the change. Start by building trust among the team. Be sure your group represents the parish.
3. Developing a Vision and Strategy  
Look at The One for inspiration. What are the moments of encounter and accompaniment that are already happening in your parish and how can they help shape your vision? Develop strategies for achieving that vision.
4. Communicating the Vision  
Use every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies with the faithful. Be sure the leadership team models the behavior expected of the community.
5. Empowering Others to Act on the Vision  
Get rid of obstacles. Avoid, "We've always done it this way." Change systems or structures that undermine the new vision. Encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities and actions.
6. Planning for and Creating Short Term Wins  
Plan for visible improvement, or "wins." Creating those wins and visibly recognize and reward people who made the wins possible. See page two for ideas.
7. Consolidating Improvements and Producing More Change  
Use your increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don't fit together and don't fit the transformational vision. See pages three through six for major ideas. Be sure to develop people who can implement the vision and reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents.
8. Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture  
Create better formation through effective leadership and planning. Articulate the connections between new endeavors develop means to ensure leadership development and continuity

To assist the parish in accomplishing these steps, **The Institute for Catholic Formation** offers:

1. Overview of the guiding/coalition team to help you choose the right candidates to outline your parish's vision.
2. Assistance in creating your parish's vision for formation.
3. Formation for your leadership team.
4. An evaluation your team can use to look at all current offerings.
5. Suggested Quick Wins
6. Formation and for small group leaders and resources for small groups
7. Suggestions for major changes to age-appropriate formation opportunities

## SUGGESTED QUICK WINS

Implementing these Quick Wins can help focus a parish's efforts on formation opportunities that are relatively easy to implement but have the potential to impact a broad group of people. Follow up is essential as you plan. Be careful to avoid flash-in-the-pan events that do not sustain the change in the culture of the parish you are seeking.

<p>Host a Lenten book study for adults with a special invitation to parents of children in faith formation.</p>	<p>Are young people invited to serve at the altar? Do you offer ongoing formation for altar servers for young boys and girls?</p>	<p>Does your parish have a Bible Study? A Rosary club? A Prayer Chain? These are simple ways to invite people to become more active in the life of the parish.</p>	<p>Shift the celebrations of First Communion to Sunday Mass, allowing families to choose a Sunday in May – connecting the family's regular Mass attendance with the newest communicants in the parish.</p>
<p>If your parish does not have a young adult ministry, consider connecting with other parishes or the young adult committee in the diocese.</p>	<p>Invite all school age children to bring their backpacks before school begins and offer a blessing of backpacks at Sunday Mass.</p>	<p>Host a back-to-school night for faith formation so parents can meet the catechists and hear about what children will learn.</p>	
<p>Celebrate your parish catechists and all schoolteachers (public and Catholic schools) with a blessing at Mass on Catechetical Sunday. This Institute can provide the resources. It's a quick and easy way to highlight those who are willing to share their faith.</p>	<p>Invite all new drivers to come forward and offer a blessing upon them. Doing this at all Sunday Masses will ensure you include the whole community.</p>	<p>Create ways for families to be involved in Sunday Mass – bringing up the gifts, taking up the collection, serving as ministers of hospitality.</p>	<p>Host an Advent wreath making workshop for all faith formation families. Bless the wreaths at Sunday Mass.</p>
	<p>Provide practical ways parents can help be the first witnesses in the ways of faith at home.</p>	<p>Create an opportunity in the summer for parents and grandparents to get together and study one of the books offered by the Institute.</p>	<p>Help your families understand what a Catholic home looks like. Offer tips and suggestions. Let the Institute assist.</p>
<p>Invite all newly married couples to a dinner once per year to celebrate their marriage and offer resources as they build their lives together.</p>	<p>Implement your parish communication plan. Create a schedule and list of topics to send out on a regular basis.</p>	<p>Invite all those parents who had their children baptized to an event where you highlight the opportunities for children and parents in the parish. Give away a calendar of events, introduce the people who make formation happen, and give specific resources that parents can use at home.</p>	

## OTHER CHANGES TO CONSIDER

In addition to the Quick Wins that offer immediate signs that your parish is reimagining faith formation at all levels, these changes are more major efforts that take more work, more volunteers, and can go a long way to changing the culture of your parish and the efficacy of your faith formation opportunities.

<p>Become a pilot parish for First Witnesses, which involves recruiting volunteers who will be trained as partner families and accompany the parents of newly baptized for the first five years.</p>	<p>Offer a retreat that is all about prayer. How do I pray? What types of prayer are there? What is Visio Divina, Lectio Divina, or Liturgy of the Hours?</p>	<p>Become a pilot parish for Stephen's Ministry and let those appropriately formed accompany those in crisis or in need.</p>
<p>Host a book club or small group faith formation just for seniors – the fastest growing population in Connecticut. Hosting it just after morning Mass might help attendance.</p>	<p>Instead of regular classroom catechesis, investigate and offer formation to catechists who wish to implement Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Join with other parishes to keep costs down.</p>	<p>Create your own or work with another parish to offer regional Vacation Bible School. It's a great way to encourage young people to learn about their faith and older teens to volunteer and share their own faith experience.</p>
<p>Introduce young people to virtuous living. What happens if you live the Works of Mercy? Offer families the chance to serve together, evaluate their time together, and encourage families to keep serving on their own.</p>	<p>What happens after Confirmation? Do your young people walk away because you are not offering reasons to stay? Reimagine youth ministry. Create a team. Investigate Life Teen and attend formation.</p>	<p>Gather twice a year with all your liturgical ministers just to share a meal together, thank them, and pray with them. Show them you value their service and commitment.</p>
<p>Host a family film night each quarter with babysitting for the youngest parishioners.</p>	<p>What would happen if your parish or a few parishes in your region offered their own Emmaus retreat for high school students and perhaps one for adults as well?</p>	<p>Consider including Theology of the Body into your curriculum.</p>
<p>Pilgrimages can change lives. Consider all the locations nearby: St. Margaret Shrine, St. Augustine Cathedral, Mother Cabrini Shrine, North American Martyrs, Mother Drexel, St. John Neumann, St. Patrick's, and the National Shrine.</p>	<p>Make the shift to family catechesis by making the parents a part of ongoing faith formation. Develop programs that involve the entire family in faith formation, with activities and lessons designed to be completed together at home.</p>	

Host a parent workshop on Internet Safety. Have any law enforcement in your parish? Tap into their expertise to help keep it real and practical.	What can you do to make liturgy more engaging to the very young? What about Children's Liturgy of the Word?	Do you offer a chance to study the faith year-round? What about mini courses taught by professors at local colleges and universities?	Can people easily find what they are looking for on your parish website? Audit the website and make needed improvements.
Offer a chance for parents of pre-teens to get together with a licensed counselor and prepare for the years and emotions ahead.	Work with the St. Jerome Center for Preaching and gather a small group each week to study Scripture and offer suggestions.	How many couples in your parish are in irregular marriages? How many of those are simply a matter of convalidation? Survey your families and see how you can accompany them back to full communion with the Church.	
Occasionally, young people miss Confirmation. Put an all call out in the parish and offer formation for anyone over 18 who missed Confirmation. The Institute can offer you an outline for this process.		Does your OCIA process end with Easter? It shouldn't. Make sure mystagogia is part of the process.	Offer a blessing of homes around Epiphany. Give an explanation at Mass and then provide tools.
Formation is not just for the young. What do the adults in your parish want to learn and who can teach it?	Create a catalog of volunteer jobs around the parish. Write job descriptions and publicize what is required. Then allow people to choose how to be involved. Form them. Clear them for service. Evaluate. Thank them. Update the descriptions as needed and rotate volunteers when you can.		How can your parish meet the needs of a ten-decade Church? Take look at everything you do and make sure people are aware.
Parent formation around the sacraments is important, but so is the everyday living of the faith. Offer a parent workshop on a regular basis to help parents and guardians be effective witnesses of the faith.		How often do you communicate with the faithful in your parish? Think beyond the Sunday bulletin.	Be intentional about how you invite people to serve. Make it personal and invitational.
Shift from classroom catechesis to small group faith formation with young people. Offer more times. Think creatively. Talk to parents about what works for them.	Consider asking for volunteers who can staff the parish office before and after all weekend Masses to make it easier to request Masses, sign up for formation, and volunteer for ministries. If all our people are at Sunday Mass and the office is closed, how are we meeting the needs of the faithful?		Work with the Institute to get every member of your parish a subscription to Hallow and then gather to discuss what people are listening to.
Develop and offer a series of online courses and webinars that cover different aspects of faith, theology, and spirituality. These can be live sessions with interactive Q&A or pre-recorded with discussion forums.	Create or utilize existing mobile apps that provide daily scripture readings, reflections, prayer guides, and other resources to help parishioners deepen their faith on the go.		

<p>Organize small groups that meet regularly to discuss scripture, share personal faith stories, and support one another in their spiritual journeys. These groups can be age-specific or interest-based.</p>	<p>Organize local or international mission trips that combine service with spiritual growth, giving participants a hands-on experience of living out their faith.</p>	<p>Host screenings of religious films, documentaries, or series followed by group discussions to explore faith-related themes and stories.</p>	<p>Offer workshops that use art, music, and drama to explore and express faith, allowing parishioners to engage creatively with religious concepts and narratives.</p>
<p>Provide every family a “Challenge of the Week” and then announce it at the end of every Mass and in the bulletin. The Institute has a list you can use to get you started.</p>	<p>Organize monthly or bi-monthly family faith nights where parents and children come together for a shared meal, followed by age-appropriate breakout sessions for learning and activities.</p>	<p>Ensure that homilies are not only inspirational but also catechetical. Incorporate teachings that help the faithful understand the liturgical season, the significance of the readings, and practical applications of the faith in daily life. Meet weekly with the faithful to hear their reflections on the readings and how it affects their lives.</p>	
<p>Provide educational inserts in the Sunday bulletin that explain aspects of the liturgy, such as the meanings of different parts of the Mass, the significance of liturgical colors, and the history of various prayers and traditions.</p>	<p>Provide classes or small group studies specifically for parents to deepen their own understanding of the Church’s teachings, which they can then share with their children.</p>	<p>Create vibrant youth and young adult ministries that offer retreats, social events, and peer-led faith discussions, making faith formation relevant and appealing to younger generations.</p>	<p>Organize informal gatherings after Mass where parishioners can discuss the day’s readings and homily over coffee. This can include guided discussions led by trained facilitators or clergy.</p>
<p>Develop a section on the parish website dedicated to parents, offering articles, videos, and materials to download to help parents integrate faith into everyday family life at home and at play.</p>	<p>Offer family retreats or mission trips that allow parents and children to experience and practice their faith together in a meaningful way.</p>	<p>Establish support groups for parents, such as mothers’ or fathers’ groups, where they can share experiences, support each other, and grow in their faith together.</p>	<p>Create a master list of every formation opportunity in the parish and who someone should contact if they wish to join. Keep that list up to date and online.</p>
<p>Offer regular opportunities for Adoration and Reconciliation for all ages, perhaps highlighting specific age groups at specific times.</p>		<p>Create a children’s choir and introduce young people to the beauty of music and teach them how music can be a bridge to the divine.</p>	



<p>Assign catechists families instead of age-groups/classes for whole family formation.</p>	<p>Affinity-based formation groups (could sports team also be your faith formation small group?)</p>	<p>Teach parent teams how to lead Lectio Divina and theological reflection, then have them host small groups of middle school or high school students.</p>
<p>Pick a theme for each month and have a parish ministry provide formation around that (liturgy = liturgical ministers; service = Knights of Columbus; end of life = bereavement ministry; scripture = Bible study group or lectors, etc.)</p>		<p>Recruit couples that have a strong marriage and invite them to be mentor couples for young people who are engaged to be married. Form the mentor couples to accompany the young.</p>
<p>Develop community-issue based formation (select an issue in your community, have groups learn what the church teaches about it, shared discernment about possible solutions, and work together to implement one)</p>	<p>Implement a series of Catholic field trips. Include religious films, pilgrimage sites, tours of churches and holy sites. Be creative. How do you bring “the church” to places around town?</p>	
<p>Host a book club with a twist: First, begin with older parishioners and a secular book. Look for spiritual themes. Then donate the books to a young adult group and have one of the older parishioners offer an introduction. Both groups meet once or twice a year for a dinner and discussion.</p>		
<p>Reverse current assumptions. Instead of “How do we get parents involved?” Ask, “How do we get involved with parents?” Instead of “How do we motivate kids to participate?” ask, “What if we tried to <u>reach</u> 100% of our teens?”</p>	<p>Work within the Liturgical Year. How do you engage based on the season? Consider this: from 0-18, the entire Christian story is heard six times. Every year the story is told. How can you help parents use this fact to share the faith?</p>	
<p>When studying Baptism, meet with parents and invite them to write letters to their children, offering advice, hopes for the future, and expressing their love and gratitude for the gift of the child.</p>	<p>Host a Mardi Gras celebration – From Feasting to Fast – and share a meal, perhaps even a potluck with families. Depart in silence as Lent begins.</p>	
<p>If you move Confirmation, be sure to have a plan in place for what’s next. Youth Ministry is the living out of discipleship in the parish and the life of the parish is the curriculum. It’s a chance to dive deeper into formation while encouraging age-appropriate social, leadership, and liturgical opportunities.</p>		

