Doing Adult Faith Formation where adults are already gathered

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Method 1

*Mining the catechetical implications already present in existing programs and events*

*Many parish gatherings have an implicit catechetical dimension.*

*Those implicit dimensions can often be made more explicit with minor modifications and a degree of intentionality.*

**AN EXAMPLE – THE CHRISTMAS GIVING TREE**
Existing structure of the program

- During October and early November the parish social outreach minister accepts requests for assistance from families that need help.
- Parish minister creates “ornaments” with age, sex, and general category (e.g. toy, clothes, etc.) for each perspective recipient with a code number.
- A Christmas tree is set up in the parish narthex during the week before the first Sunday of Advent with these “ornaments” on it.

Existing structure of the program

- On the first Sunday of Advent parishioners select ornaments from the tree and register them with volunteers who staff a table next to the tree.
- People bring the wrapped gifts the weekend of the third Sunday of Advent with a gift tag on it containing the code number. Volunteers receive it and log it in.
- Volunteers take the gifts during the week and sort them based on code numbers, replacing gift tags with ones with the actual first names of the recipients. They follow up with any gifts not received.
- Families pick up their wrapped gifts at the parish beginning December 20.

How does this activity relate to Catechetical Goals?

Here are 12 learning targets that could be addressed:

- **Grade 4:** The Gospels indicate that people will be judged primarily on the basis of their willingness to be involved in helping others in need.
- **Grade 5:** All Christians have a responsibility to be concerned about and care for everyone.
- **Grade 6:** Every person in the world is a spiritual brother and sister according to Jesus' teachings. The goal of that community is the responsibility of every individual.
- **Grade 7:** Christians are called to understand themselves as part of a broader community. The good of that community is the responsibility of every individual.
- **Grade 8:** The spiritual and corporal works of mercy are actions that help one's neighbor with their bodily and spiritual needs. These works are motivated by charity, which shows love of God and neighbor.
- **Grade 10:** Christians are called to stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized.
- **Grade 11:** The Church is involved in both the act of charity and the work for justice.
- **Adult:** The most basic principle of the Christian moral life is an awareness that every person bears the dignity of being made in the image of God.
- **Adult:** While all human beings are equal in dignity, it has been a constant part of the Christian religious tradition to remember that the poor or marginalized are to be given special consideration and care.
- **Adult:** Christians are called to work for the transformation of society in all their daily activities. This is achieved by promoting the common good and serving those in need by giving preferential treatment to the poor, powerless, and oppressed.
- **Adult:** Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to action for and among the poor and oppressed.
How can we make an appropriation of some of these targets an explicit goal?

- What follows are three suggestions of minor adaptations/additions to the program that require of the planners some additional intentionality but which, for the participants particularly, are thoroughly integrated into the existing experience.

- The suggestions focus on
  1. Training of the volunteer assistants
  2. The parishioner experience when they select and register an ornament
  3. The parishioner experience when they turn in their gift

Training of volunteers

- Stress to volunteers that may have contact with the recipients of the gifts that they are in no circumstances to act judgmental, superior, or patronizing toward those who receive them. Remind them that
  - every person bears the dignity of being made in the image of God.
  - the poor or marginalized are to be given special consideration and care.

Training of volunteers

- To volunteers who have contact with parishioners who will be donating the gifts, stress
  - When registering the ornament to the donating family have them say, “Thank you for your effort as a Christian disciple.”
  - When they receive the wrapped gifts have them say, “Thank you for helping us as a parish give witness to our belief in the solidarity of the human family.”
When parishioners select the ornament

- On the reverse of each "ornament", include the following text:
  - "Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to action for and among the poor and oppressed."
  - Thank you for effort as a Christian disciple to assist the Church in her mission for and among the poor!
- The goal of this is, from the beginning, to get parishioners to think of their action as being essentially connected to their identity as Christian disciples and to connect this activity to the broader mission of the Church.

When parishioners return the gift

- When the parishioners return the wrapped gift, give them a small flyer in return. On one side of the flyer have the following text:
  - Thank you for helping to meet the physical and emotional needs of some of our poor brothers and sisters within our community! Your charitable gift to a person unknown to you is testimony of our Christian belief that we are all sisters and brothers. Everyone is my neighbor whom I am called to love as myself.
  - God blesses those who come to the aid of the poor, for it is by what they have done for the poor and oppressed that Christ will recognize his chosen ones.
  - Having made a material sacrifice, we now ask you to make a spiritual one as well. Over the next few days, please consider as a family praying for the recipient of this gift and his or her family.

- On the opposite side of the flyer have the following text:
  - In this community effort, through acts of Christian charity, we seek to meet some of the immediate needs of the poor families in our community.
  - As Christian disciples we are also asked to consider the root causes of poverty and, in justice, to seek to bring about a transformation of society so that these causes are eliminated.
  - Here are some groups and organizations within our parish and our community that work for the transformation of society. Please consider becoming educated and involved in their work and efforts. <List them>
COMMENTS OR THOUGHTS ON THIS EXAMPLE?

Complete write-up of this example is online at http://www.archgh.org/default/OC2/Framework/Christmas%20Giving%20Tree.pdf

Can you think of other examples?

Wouldn’t it be great if we had more examples like this?

• We (i.e. Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston) think so, too!
• Inviting submission of such examples
• To encourage submissions, announcing a CONTEST
• All submissions received by 4:30pm on Friday, October 31, 2014 will be eligible for the contest.
• Winners will be announced no later than Friday, December 5, 2014.
• All outstanding examples (and not just winners) will be posted to Archdiocesan website
Method 2

Following a theme as a parish over an extended period of time

• There are many groups of adults that already gather regularly in parishes.
  – Parish councils
  – Finance councils
  – Fraternal organizations
  – Various social outreach groups
  – And committees of every shape and size.
• Provide the leaders of the various groups with a catechetical tool that could be used during their regularly scheduled meetings.

Examples

• St. Luke Parish in Houston did something like this in preparation for the implementation of the new English translation of the Roman Missal (I have copies if you want to see what they did.)
• The Archdiocese for the Military Service during the Year of Faith http://www.milarch.org/site/c.dwMcQjUJiusG/b.8295991/k.4D95/Catechesis_Prior_to_Mass.htm
• A brand new free resource prepared by the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston breaking open the theme of the catechetical year and correlating it to their Framework

Comments or Thoughts?