Fall 2026

A Message from Sr. Ellen Rose…

"We should try to live in such a way that if the Gospels were lost, they would be rewritten by looking at us."
-Anthony Bloom

As August draws to a close, I am sure that many of you join me in preparing for September. Actually, a good number of summer days are preparation time! As catechetical leaders, principals, teachers and catechists September is a "beginning" – the start of our regularly scheduled faith formation sessions and the 2026-27 school year. Evangelization, the proclamation of Christ and His Gospel, takes on a particular focus and intentionality as we move into September.

This summer there were three events that addressed our vocation to spread the Gospel and the irreplaceable role we as teachers and catechists have in the formation and education of those entrusted to our care.

The Faith Formation Office sponsored two "August Bonanzas!" The Bonanzas were day long events on August 8 and 15 that provided the opportunity for catechetical leaders and catechists to meet diocesan certification requirements. On August 24 new teachers in our Catholic schools participated in the first of three *New Teacher Orientation* sessions which addressed the mission and identity of our schools.

The opportunity to present at these three events prompted me to reflect on my role as a catechist and teacher. As catechists and teachers, we need to live the faith that we

proclaim. With that in mind I share some topics that prompted personal reflection as I prepared for the Bonanzas and NTO sessions.

Catechist/Teacher: The most important element in evangelization is the catechist and teacher. He or she sets the tone, serves as the leader and example to the students and is God's primary channel of grace during the faith formation session or the school classroom.

Holiness: Catechists and teachers are called to holiness, the fullness of charity, the great commandment to love God and our neighbor. Growth in holiness is a continuous process. St. Paul's experience of omitting to do the good he knows he should do and choosing the evil that should be avoided (cf Rm 7:19) reminds us that conversion of life is necessary as we strive to live the great commandment.

Human Person: Every person is made in the image and likeness of God. God is a community of persons. He is not an isolated, solitary individual. He is in relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Made in His image means we are called to community, living in relationship with God and others.

Faith: Faith is first and foremost a relationship with Christ. Proclaiming the good news of salvation, the proclamation of the Gospel is our ministry. Jesus is the good news of salvation. In His goodness and wisdom God stepped out of His mystery, lifted the veil so to speak and revealed Himself by sending His Son. Why? To save us, to show us by word and deed how to live the great commandment so that one day we can enjoy eternal life.

Supernatural Vision of the Person: The Baltimore Catechism game a succinct answer to the question why did God make us? "God made us to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in Heaven." God made us for this life and for heaven. The children and young people that we encounter were created to be good citizens of this world and good citizens of heaven. They are called to be saints. We are called to recognize their eternal destiny and by our words and deeds accompany them on their journey of life and faith.

Witness: You may have heard the saying "Faith is caught not taught." The saying is often used to emphasize good example as an important aspect of our evangelization efforts. Paul the VI highlighted the role of good example. "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to leachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses (*Evangelization in the Modern World*, 41)." The USCCB defines evangelization as "The proclamation of Christ and his Gospel **by word and the testimony of life,** in fulfillment of Christ's command." The saving love of the person, words and actions of Christ should be boldly and joyfully proclaimed through our words, and by our testimony of life.

We must be witnesses to the words and deeds of Jesus. We cannot proclaim a person we do not know and love. We cannot proclaim authentically words and deeds we do not live.

Christ's Presence: We are called to lead our students to Christ and to find Christ in them. Sometimes it is easy to find Him in others, and sometimes it is not. Yet, every child needs to know that he or she is loved and to be introduced to the saving love of Christ that is at the heart of the Gospel. As a catechist or teacher, we are in a unique position to evangelize each student by being the loving presence of Christ in the classroom. Christ lives in us. Christ makes his home in each student also.

Tabernacles: Think of the most beautiful tabernacle you have seen, a plane unadorned tabernacle and an unremarkable, unexceptional or nondescript tabernacle. Now think of your students. Some are young and filled with joy, are positive, pay attention and participate in class. They are the beautiful tabernacles. Think of your students with rough edges. They lose focus, do not pay attention and do not do assignments. These are yhr plain unadorned tabernacles. Think of your negative, unhappy, sullen, not wanting to be in class students and the ones you cannot reach. These are the unremarkable, nondescript tabernacles. All three groups are tabernacles – some resonating the person of Jesus splendidly others not so much and perhaps very little. Yet all are tabernacles.

The items noted above are the concepts, responsibilities and images that I considered when I prepared presentations for the Bonanzas and the New Teacher Orientation. Self-reflection is an important process for us to pursue if we are going to be authentic and genuine messengers of the Gospel.

We have an awesome responsibility to know our faith, live our faith and share our faith. We cannot accomplish this without God's grace. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization, inspiring us to proclaim the Gospel. May we be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the abundant grace that flows from the reception of the sacraments especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

Let us pray for each other as we go forth to proclaim Gospel by word and testimony of life. I end this message by returning to its beginning.

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they would be rewritten by looking at us."
-Anthony Bloom

A Message from Kristin…

Sacramentality, Nature, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Many of us spend our days helping others recognize God's presence—in classrooms, parish halls, chancery offices, and liturgical celebrations. Yet in the midst of busy ministry, we can overlook one of the most accessible places where God continually reveals himself: the natural world.

Arthur C. Brooks has spent years studying the art and science of happiness. Among his themes is the importance of stepping away from constant stimulation and spending time in nature. Research consistently points to the benefits of natural environments for reducing stress, improving attention, fostering gratitude, and increasing overall well-being. Brooks often observes that many people discover greater happiness not by adding more activity to their lives, but by recovering a sense of wonder and contemplation.

For Catholics, this insight is not merely psychological. It is profoundly sacramental.

The World Charged with God's Presence

Catholicism has always understood creation as more than just scenery. The Church teaches that God communicates through visible realities. Water, oil, bread, wine, fire, touch, and human relationships for example.

The Catechism teaches that creation bears witness to its Creator. “The beauty of Creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator and ought to inspire the respect and submission of man’s intellect and will.” (CCC 341) The beauty of a sunrise, the rhythm of the seasons, the vastness of the ocean, or the quiet dignity of an old tree can draw our minds and hearts toward God. Nature becomes a sign – a tangible reminder that we live in a universe sustained by divine love.

In this sense, Catholics should not be surprised that time spent in nature contributes to happiness. When in nature we are encountering something divine and you can feel it!

Happiness and Wonder

Brooks frequently distinguishes between pleasure and happiness. Pleasure is immediate and often fleeting. Happiness is deeper, rooted in meaning, relationships, and a sense of purpose.

Nature invites precisely this deeper form of happiness. Standing before a mountain range (we know this well!) or gazing at a star-filled sky reminds us that we are not at the center of the universe. We become less preoccupied with ourselves and more attentive to the gift of existence.

It opens the heart to gratitude, and gratitude remains one of the surest pathways to true happiness.

A Sacramental Vision for Ministry

For those engaged in ministry and education, this connection between nature and sacramentality offers important opportunities.

Catechists can invite students to reflect on creation as a revelation of God's goodness. A lesson on the sacraments can begin not only in a textbook but also with an observation of water, light, or growing plants.

Catholic school teachers can incorporate moments of outdoor learning, encouraging students to see the natural world through the lens of faith. Science and theology don’t need to compete; both can inspire awe before the mystery of creation.

Parish and diocesan leaders can model a spirituality that values silence, reflection, and encounter with God's creation. Parish walking groups, outdoor prayer experiences, Rosary walks, and care for our common home can be opportunities for evangelization and renewal.

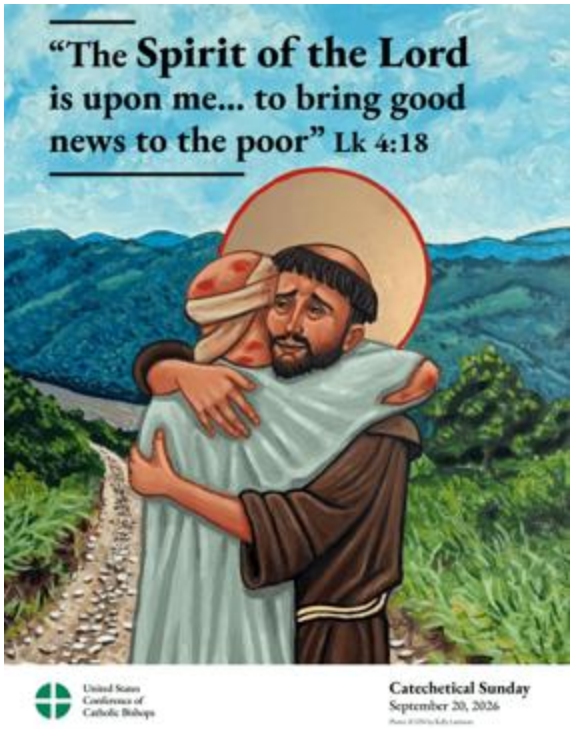
In a culture increasingly dominated by screens, these practices also offer a powerful witness. They remind people that happiness cannot be downloaded or streamed. It is cultivated through real encounters—with God, with others, and with the world God has made. (AI was used to edit this article.)

For those who want to dig deeper:

What is Sacramentality

Why You Literally Need to Touch Grass

A Message from Anita…



Catechetical Sunday opens the Catechetical Year:

As we return to our parish faith formation programs this September, we want to say *"Thank You* "to all catechists in the Diocese of Ogdensburg for living out your baptismal call to share the faith. To recognize our catechists, this year, Catechetical Sunday is September 20, 2026.

Beginning in 1971, the USCCB's Department of Education began producing materials to help parishes celebrate the event at the local level. When the Committee on Catechesis, now named the Committee of Evangelization and Catechesis, was named by the Conference as a standing Committee, it continued to publish Catechetical Sunday materials each year.

Consult the USCCB's website for current materials.

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. Catechetical Sunday is an opportunity for all to rededicate themselves to this mission as a community of faith." We hope all of you will be recognized at Mass on September 20.

National Gathering on Christian Initiation Offers Renewed Vision for OCIA Ministry

On August 5 and 6, I had the opportunity to attend the National Gathering on Christian Initiation at Loyola University Chicago's Lake Shore Campus. This year's gathering themed *The Rituals of the OCIA: Prepare, Celebrate, Reflect*, brought together parish leaders, initiation ministers, catechists, liturgists, musicians, priests, deacons and diocesan leaders from across the country to deepen their understanding of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults.

The conference focused on the transformative power of the Church's rites and the importance of preparing catechumens, candidates, ministers, and parish communities for meaningful liturgical celebrations. Through presentations, prayer, discussion, and reflection, participants explored how the rituals of the OCIA form disciples and strengthen vibrant parish communities rooted in worship and mission.

The gathering offered valuable insight into how parishes can prepare well, celebrate reverently, and reflect mystagogically on the rites of initiation. I returned with renewed appreciation for the OCIA as more than a program; it is a parish-wide process of conversion, welcome, formation, and mission. The experience will help strengthen our local efforts to accompany those seeking full initiation into the Catholic Church.

I came back with several new resources from LTP which I have in my office in Plattsburg. Contact me at 518-310-3669 or asoltero@rcdony.org if you'd like to review them. They will be listed on the Faith Formation tab of the diocesan website under resources.

A spring LEAD event on OCIA is in the planning phase. Watch for details later this year!

Fall LEAD Event: Journey with Christ

As autumn begins, we give thanks for the many ways God continues to call our parish communities into deeper discipleship, shared ministry, and lifelong learning. This fall is a wonderful time to renew our commitment to forming people of every age for a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

Save the Date: October 17th, Norfolk, 9:15 am – 2:30 pm

Theme: *An Integrated Approach to Lifelong Parish Faith Formation*
Presenter: Dr. Steven Serafin, Executive Director Faith & Family Life Catholic Ministries

All parish leaders, catechists, ministry volunteers, and all who care about faith formation are invited to take part in the upcoming *Journey with Christ* LEAD event on Saturday, October 17th in Norfolk. The gathering, titled *An Integrated Approach to Lifelong Parish Faith Formation*, will focus on how parishes can nurture faith across every stage of life while building stronger connections among families, ministries, sacramental preparation, youth formation, adult formation, and the wider parish community.

Rather than seeing faith formation as a series of separate programs, this event will invite participants to consider a more integrated parish vision—one that supports children, youth, parents, adults, and older parishioners as companions on the lifelong journey of discipleship. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on how parish life, worship, service,

family faith, and catechesis can work together to help people encounter Christ and grow in faith.

Dr. Steven Serafin will offer practical insights, encouragement, and parish-based strategies for creating formation opportunities that are welcoming, connected, and mission-focused. This event is especially recommended for pastors, parish catechetical leaders, coordinators of religious education, youth ministry leaders, OCIA team members, catechists, and parish volunteers.

Why Attend?

- Explore a parish-wide vision for lifelong faith formation.
- Consider ways to connect family, youth, adult, and sacramental formation.
- Gain practical ideas for strengthening collaboration among parish ministries.
- Be renewed in the shared mission of helping all people grow as disciples of Christ.
- **Watch for registration information.** We look forward to gathering as parish leaders and companions on the journey with Christ.

Confirmation Update

Save the Date: November NET Ministry Confirmation Retreats

As we move into fall and our sacramental preparation sessions begin once again, please mark your calendars for the Diocesan Confirmation Retreats provided by NET Ministries. We are fortunate to be able to bring them back to our diocese this year. They do an outstanding job! The dates and locations are:

Friday, November 20th – Watertown

Saturday, November 21st – Massena

Sunday, November 22nd – Plattsburgh

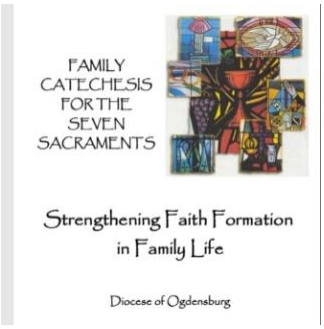
Watch e-notes and email for registration information coming from Cathy Russell very soon!

Confirmation Resources

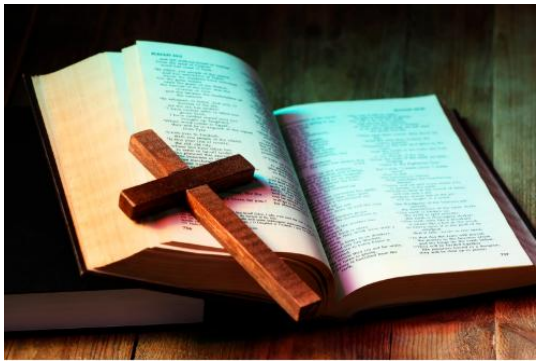
For new confirmation group leaders or catechists: An **excellent** resource for Confirmation preparation can be found at **Ascension Press: Chosen: Your Journey to Confirmation.** I highly recommend you check it out!

Family Catechesis

All catechists should be using some formal catechetical material. Additional resource suggestions for sacramental preparation can be found in our *Family Catechesis for the Seven Sacraments* document on the Diocesan website, Faith Formation page under RESOURCES or click here: FamilyCatechesis.pdf



A Message from Cathy…



"Lay leaders must foster openness and communion… guide those under their care with discernment and transparency, so that they may remain open to the world and grounded in communion" -Pope Leo

Continuing the legacy that began in 1990 and accepting the challenge of Pope Leo's words above, the Formation For Ministry program has twenty-three candidates beginning the second year. In their first year, through a partnership with Boston College's online Crossroads program, they have completed courses in Old and New Testament, The Creed, Spirituality and Sacraments. During the second year, courses include Catholic Morality, Catholic Social Teaching, Church History, The Church and the Eucharist.

The first year also includes two in-person workshops on exactly what the call to lay ministry means, how to pray with different forms of prayer and an assessment of what their gifts are. They have worked with their pastors at least twice and have, with their input, chosen a field of ministry for the second year that matches parish needs and personal gifts.

In the second year, candidates meet in person four times. Part of the day is devoted to important topics and the rest of the day they meet with their chosen ministry workshop leader to develop skills to use in that ministry. Those topics include Formation Ministries, Youth Ministry, Parish Outreach Ministries, Liturgical Ministries and Ministry to the Sick and Elderly.

These fine men and women will be officially commissioned by Bishop LaValley in June after they have completed a weekend retreat.

We will be looking for the next group of lay leaders in the spring. Perhaps you will be one of them or know someone who could be one. For more information, contact the program coordinator, Cathy Russell by email, crussell@rcdony.org or by phone, 518-637-6527.

A Message from Youth Ministry...

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” — Psalm 127:1

As another year of ministry begins, August can easily become a month of lists.

Calendars need to be filled. Volunteers need to be recruited. Rooms need to be reserved. Lessons need to be planned. Registrations need to be opened. There is always one more email to send, one more meeting to schedule, and one more detail that needs our attention before young people begin walking through our doors again.

But before we ask what needs to be done, perhaps there is a more important question:

What does God want to do in us?

Psalm 127 gives us a sobering reminder: “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”

That does not mean that our planning, preparation, and hard work are unimportant. Quite the opposite. It reminds us that Christian ministry is fundamentally different from simply running a good program. We are not merely trying to organize activities, convey information, or keep young people engaged. We are cooperating with the Holy Spirit in building up the Kingdom of God.

And the first person God wants to work on is us.

We sometimes speak about ministry as though God needs us to accomplish His work. Of course, He doesn't. God does not lack the power to change a human heart without our help. He could accomplish His purposes without our programs, meetings, retreats, or carefully prepared lesson plans.

And yet He calls us. I think there is something important in that.

God's invitation to ministry is not only about the people we serve. **It is also about our own conversion.** In asking us to participate in His work, God invites our wills to bend more completely toward His. Every sincere "yes" to ministry can become another "yes" to Him.

There is an old saying that captures this well: **You cannot give what you do not have.**

We cannot convincingly invite young people into a life of prayer if prayer is absent from our own lives. It is difficult to teach them to trust God while refusing to surrender our own anxieties to Him, or to speak about forgiveness while holding onto our own grudges. If we want young people to see the joy of Christian life, that joy has to be something we are seeking ourselves.

Young people, especially, have remarkably good radar for insincerity. They may not know every word in the Catechism, but they can often tell the difference between someone who is merely talking about Christ and someone who is genuinely trying to live with Him.

That makes these final weeks before another ministry year a good opportunity for some spiritual preparation.

What attitudes have I allowed to creep into my ministry? What bad habits have become comfortable? Am I carrying a grudge against a coworker, volunteer, parent, pastor, or young person? Has impatience become my normal response? Have I become discouraged or cynical? Have I become so busy doing things *for* God that I have stopped spending time *with* God?

These questions aren't meant to discourage us. They are simply part of preparing ourselves for ministry. Maybe we need another Holy Hour before we prepare another lesson. Maybe we need to get to Confession before we build another program. Maybe there is something we have been carrying around that we simply need to hand over to the Lord.

Before we ask young people to encounter Jesus Christ this year, we should make sure that we are continuing to encounter Him ourselves.

Let the Lord build the house. And let Him begin with us.

Ready to Give an Answer

One way the Office of Youth Ministry hopes to support that renewal this year is through a new initiative called **Ready to Give an Answer**. This series will provide, **free of charge**, professional formation and opportunities for spiritual development for those who work with young people throughout our diocese.

Though this is a FREE series, you **MUST REGISTER**! *Use the QR to register now!*

Our first topic will explore **Natural Theology and the relationship between faith and science**, with particular attention to the questions young people ask about the existence of God. The goal is not simply to give ministers better arguments, but to help us understand our faith more deeply so that, as Scripture says, we may truly be "ready to give an answer" for the hope that is within us.

Our first session will be held **September 12 at the St. Mary's Parish Center in Canton**, sponsored by **Siena Academy.** The October session will be sponsored by **Seton Catholic in Plattsburgh.** Date/Topic is TBA.

If you are interested in hosting one of our monthly sessions, please contact me at plooby@rcdony.org or call 315-854-2894.

As we begin this new ministry year, our hope is not simply that it will be a *busy* year for Youth Ministry, but a **fruitful** one.

That fruitfulness begins in our own relationship with Christ. If we are growing in prayer, continuing to learn, and allowing ourselves to be converted, we will be much better prepared to help the young people entrusted to us do the same.

May the Lord build the house—and may we have the humility to let Him begin with us.

🗓️ Dates to Remember…

September

2nd: FFM: Christian Faith and Moral Character course begins

12th: Natural Theology class in Canton

19th: Formation for Ministry Workshop

October

14th: FFM: Catholic Social Teaching course begins

17th: LEAD Event in Norfolk: An Integrated Approach to Lifelong Parish Faith Formation

24th: Formation for Ministry Workshop

November

20th – NET Ministry Retreat in Watertown

21st – NET Ministry Retreat in Massena

22nd – NET Ministry Retreat in Plattsburgh

January

1st: FFM Self Reflection due

6th: FFM: History of the Church I course begins

February

17th: FFM: History of the Church II course begins

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