

*St. Vincent Ferrer Parish*

State of the Parish Report

Pentecost Sunday  
2006

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Pastor

## **State of the Parish Report**

**Pentecost Sunday 2006**

In this 2006 State of the Parish Report I will focus on catechesis. The '04 and '05 reports developed the contrast between charismatic leadership and structural leadership. Leadership flows from good catechesis.

My prayer for you as you read this report is that you enter into it as a reflection. Enter into your SVF experience and the experience of the USA culture. To this add your faith journey inside and outside the Roman Catholic faith. Reflect on where you are and where the parish is. Reflect on where the Spirit is transforming the USA and the parish itself. Reflect on where you have been and where you would like to be. Please see yourself as painting many strokes on a canvas. This is a report of depth and pluralism and inclusiveness. "Catholic" means universal. See yourself in everything that follows. See our Jesus Christ in all levels of who we are and are becoming.

Catechesis is what we teach and what we are taught when it comes to our faith. Sometimes we think of this as something for children, but the reality is that we must be at the Master's feet all of our life to know, love and serve Him. Each sacrament has its own catechesis to bring us into the fold. The more we drift from the basics, the more the gospel message needs to be taught without distortion. Whenever any of us know it all, we become unteachable. In our gospel development we are always learning.

Catechesis is a challenge for all of us. We never arrive. It is also generational. When a family becomes unchurched they become uncatechized. Cardinal George says that in the Chicago area we have lost 3 to 4 generations because they are unchurched. This includes those catholic educated through catholic grade schools, catholic high schools and even catholic colleges. Educating the mind with ideas in itself does not cause someone to be faith-filled. We have folks experiencing full and total Catholic education who now only go to church for a funeral or wedding, and call themselves a "faithful" Catholic. This is against our teachings. "Practicing" Catholic faith is not merely an idea, exercised occasionally, but literally a day in and day out carrying of the cross of Christ and His glory of resurrection.

The major catechist is always Christ. That might seem like something presumed but some people join a church as a social institution. They could not care less about Jesus, His path, or the complexity of faith. Social religion needs no catechesis because it concerns itself with only the external world of being seen. Jesus Christ teaches us the interior- He is the interior life.

In this 75<sup>th</sup> Jubilee year we can dip into our catechesis as a parish. The Archdiocesan 1980 history by Rev. Msgr. Harry C. Koenig, S.T.D. states of SVF: “The lack of lay participation in the parish was ascribed to the fact that many parishioners had extensive social obligations relating to their business. Although the pastor and his associates found it difficult to involve such people in many facets of parish life, much important groundwork was laid in the 1960’s.” (Page 1492 of volume II). From our roots our catechesis was challenged. Church for SVF had signs of being external rather than central; more social than catechetical.

In our secularized culture we as Catholics have sinned by trying to fit in. The foundations of the USA were not Catholic friendly. Even though many scholars would say the greatest remaining prejudice of our nation is anti-Catholicism, we have fit in; we have assimilated into the fabric of the culture. Remember that we are in a culture of death, a culture of comfort, a culture of individualism (not family), a culture of litigation, a culture fueled by fear, a culture sufficient unto itself, a culture substituting information for thought, a media culture thriving on and causing conflict, a culture of body young and body beautiful, a culture of the now, a culture of the physical, a culture of entitlement, and a culture of secularism (not faith). Yes, there are more but I am only making the point that we are a fold that the Shepherd is calling back to Himself. The time of shearing is at hand. To fit into all this culture stuff we have and will compromise the gospel.

We are surrounded by a culture that makes anger, bullying, and disrespect all fashionable. We easily become crude, brazen, and aggressive. You can readily see the challenges to family rearing and the covenant of marriage. Some years back the author, M. Scott Peck, M.D., a psychiatrist wrote the book **A World Waiting To Be Born: Civility Rediscovered.** Peck is now a Catholic. His most famous book was **The Road Less Traveled.** What I appreciate about his writing is that he never bashed the culture or became negative but called us to the higher road. Rediscovering, rebuilding, and repairing our culture is a huge piece of work. Manners, social skills and amenities are all part of what Peck calls us to rediscover. Teaching respect for each other, human life, property, sacred space, etc. is all welcome in any era. Jesus’ message is about a world waiting to be born. We are called to discover the deepest self. Grace builds on nature. Learning and teaching the healthy social order of the common good takes us from the natural order into a reality that is holy, respectful and sacred.

This “catechesis” by the culture erodes believers, causing many to look at religion/faith as a product or a commodity. Some of the ways we now fit in are monthly attendance of church instead of a weekly presence; using church membership like an identity card to be flashed and cashed in for the product; sacraments become products to be administered on demand. Do you hear the entitlement? Sacraments succumb to a “customer satisfaction” principle. The USA culture says everything is for sale; everything has its price. God and religion become part of that list. All these factors erode the pillar of marriage and family within our society, the catechesis of the home that raised us.

Parents are the primary catechists of children. I would say that the everyday reality of this is often that it is grandparents who are the catechizers. Simple catechetical realities like genuflecting, church behavior, church dress, etc. are too often absent from the actions of our children. Respect for authority, property, time and each other are all gospel catechesis. A parent asked me why I speak so much about Sunday worship. The parent told me it was optional with Vatican II. My response is that *culturally* the practice has become optional, but the church norms have remained the same: sickness or transportation are the only excuses for being absent. Even workers can make Mass with the introduction of Saturday and Sunday night Masses at varied times throughout the city. In the vows of marriage and baptism, the parents say that they will properly educate their children in the faith. Children model their parent's actions.

There is such a thing as bad catechesis. If practice makes perfect, then practicing incorrectly just deepens the imperfection. The absence of catechesis leaves us ill informed and connecting with only personalities and not teachings. This can cause us to be concerned with "whom" we know rather than "what" we know. Sometimes people associate sacraments with a priest rather than Christ. Sometimes priests can give the impression they own the sacraments. Both of these are poor catechesis.

Catechesis has two major blocks. One is "*hafta*" and the other is "*gimme*". "What do I hafta do to get the sacrament?" "Why do I hafta do such-n'-such?" With the world of hafta, catechesis is seen as legislation and not a call to the life of the divine. Norms and guidelines become hafta hoops to be jumped through. An attitude of getting by becomes paramount. With the gimme we have entered the world of entitlement. This means that all the norms and guidelines are well and good but that they do not apply to me. Exemption becomes the norm. Sometimes this is seen erroneously as pastoral.

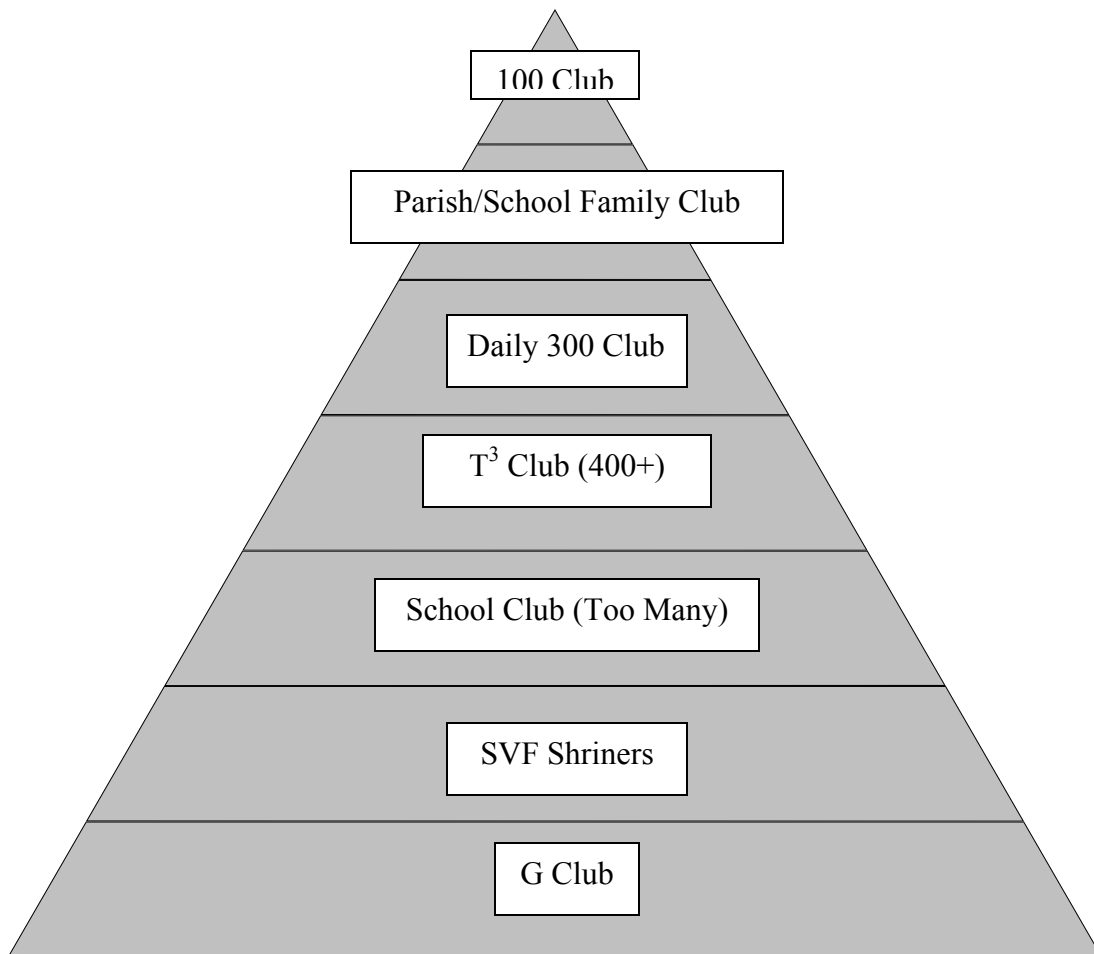
Two major sources of catechesis at SVF are the web and the literature rack. Our website is getting much acclaim. One newly-founded parish outside of Melbourne, Australia read our website and informed us that they are modeling their new parish upon it. A Bishop who was here for a wedding saw our bulletin's printed norms on sacraments and said it will become the norm in his diocese. The constant tweaking and honing nature of our website keeps the information continuously up to date.

The second is the rack of literature in the church. This has both general catechesis and parish brochures specific to SVF life. Many folks are not comfortable asking questions. They sometimes feel embarrassed for being uninformed. Also, questions of a personal spiritual nature can be a bit touchy. The "CARE NOTES" help address these tough issues in a loving and healing way. There is a flow of literature from the rack that is replenished weekly. Anything desired to be added here can be brought to the parish office.

Later in this report the staff will have sections to give examples of catechesis in their areas of ministry. What I want to do is make a general profile of the many

“churches” within the SVF community that we as staff struggle to serve. I will call this “the 7 story mountain of catechesis” simply showing the volume in the parish and then their perspective based on their amount of catechesis. When I use the word “club”, it is as a metaphor only; there is no “club” per se.

***The 7 Story Mountain of Catechesis***



This pyramid reflects the volume of people in each category according to how they are catechized. The desired volume would be reversed, i.e., having the greatest number of parishoners also be the most catechized.

**The 100 Club** This is the top of the mountain. Being our smallest group in the parish at less than 100, these folks have learned the gospel by truly being the church in action. These members are unpaid yet put in 20 to 40 hours a week in parish ministry. They are all about the Lord. They believe that they personally can transform SVF and make it better than they found it by being part of the graced solution. For them it is a privilege to serve because somewhere along the line they were catechized that faith bears fruit in service. They connect Jesus Christ and Church in their ongoing actions. Church for them is ministry. In their humility these folks feel like they do little or nothing wishing they could do more. They are the face of SVF using affirmation as the gospel builder. These folks know the most about Catholicism and love to learn even more. Much of their life beyond SVF is faith based in other church communities or the Archdiocese.

**Parish/School Family Club** This group sees parish as extended family. They are raising families in faith and want to raise generations to come by their loyalty to Christ and His Church. These folks have been catechized in sacrificing time and money for the sake of faith. Being parents they are visionary by nature. Sunday Mass is a classroom of learning with these families. **Remember that catechesis is primarily experiential in nature.** Marriage vows and parenting is gospel based and this is number one in their life values. This group is less than 100 families—to be accurate, more like 80 families maximum. These families connect primarily with the parish as extended family. They are teaching their little ones that church is sacramental, social, recreational—the whole ball of wax.

**The Daily Club** The daily club is based in the “daily bread”. These folks are into daily liturgy—I would include the adoration peoples in this. Liturgy is always the best catechizer. This group learns the daily scriptures and is feeding on Christ in the sacrament of the altar. Our daily Masses gather from well beyond our boundaries as parish. In Lent and Advent there is a bulging in this group. This power house of prayer is one of the strongest SVF gifts. The Daily Club is about 300 people strong.

**The T3 Club** T stands for time, talent and treasure. This is that quarter of the parish who make certain they are involved in one way or another. They volunteer for ministries and committees; they are catechized to give. The T3 Club is not the type to do something for show but rather to make a difference. They are stretched in all they already do and try to do more with all three T’s. Being of service is their idea of church. Financial responsibility to the parish is part of their lives. Christ is visible in the T3. These people are learning of Christ and expanding their world of the gospel. This club is over 400 households. (The SVF membership roster is a bit under 3000.)

Let’s do the math. Please do not add these first groups together thinking the sum will give us a membership total. Many individuals and families find themselves in more than one of these “clubs.”

**NOTE:** Herein lies a break. Every club mentioned to this point is teachable. That means catechesis is part of their intake of the gospel. Christ builds their church. Christ renews the parish. Christ is the changing factor in their lives. The three remaining clubs will be primarily social based as opposed to faith based. Church will be a social reality to be seen more than faith based to be transformed from within. For the social based person, the word “Christ” causes a question or frown to arise on their face almost afraid of becoming a religious fanatic. The catechetical model of the three clubs to follow is that they will catechize the catechist. From their non-practice they are most vocal and sometimes belligerent. These groups will see everything as their own static way because they are not brought to the teachings of mother Church. The clubs already listed are small in number compared to the mass numbers in the following clubs.

Symptoms of social based to faith based people is major. Social based Catholics will make everything personal. Not being able to be catechized, they take everything personally. Gossip, spin, bullying, etc. can be the negative side. Conversation is not about gospel content, virtue development, or the quest of the Christ fountain within; rather conversations will focus on self, feelings, critiques, reviews, etc. Sins of slander, character assassination, detraction, and pride are part of our culture formed persona. This all echoes the culture litany I listed above inviting us to be secular.

**School club +** This would be folks using the school as school. They see SVF as a school with a church attached—not a church with a school attached. The *Wall Street Journal* published a study some years back listing the top five reasons parents choose a private school for their children. The top four listed location, discipline, academics, and security. Faith ranked as the fifth motivation for choosing a private school. This reality is reflected by many of those in the school club. They are not necessarily opposed to the faith—it is just not paramount in their lives. As a matter of fact, if asked what their faith is they would say “catholic”. But it is only a label. They have no intention of being churched. They are catechized into an external socialization of religion. They would come to church if their child is involved in something and treat it akin to a recital or pageant. Some reasons for choosing the private school would be status, location, discipline, personal attention, traditional customs, etc. ( In private schools nationally faith is usually about fifth on the list for the reason it is chosen. ) With this catechetical model what happens is the parish can be seen as anything on the spectrum from intruding to just being tolerated. These folks belong to the school at best but not the parish. Their number is way too large. Every Friday Fr Michael wishes the school children a good weekend and reminds them of the Sunday worship. The Sunday Mass is the most important classroom of the week.

**SVF “shriners” club** SVF is seen by many as a shrine to visit in prayer; a beautiful huge church. A shrine is a place where folks visit but do not necessarily belong. A shrine is a destination of pilgrimage for a divine favor or holy product or a transcendent experience. This group is literally thousands. They want to be served a sacrament when it is timely for their life. They will attempt to catechize

the staff person they contact on *how it should be*. This usually goes to their experience of sacrament totally disconnected from a practiced life of faith. Jesus Christ is not part of their vocabulary—they want a church sacrament and argue an undeveloped catechesis. Referring to Christ they may try to place a guilt trip on the catechizer by saying Jesus gave people what they wanted and would not turn them away. Their connection with SVF is perhaps a passing experience where they are not registered but claim membership now for the sacrament of choice. This could be alumni, former parishioners, friends or family of a regular parishioner, or maybe just someone who always admired the beauty of the church building. They will play the entitlement card and up the ante with threats. Much of their catechesis pre-dates Vatican II theology. Their notions come from media, movies and stereotypes, not the present reality of the Church.

You should not be surprised that everyone loves to shop at SVF for all their church needs. Do not put “Catholic” as a requirement for this. A chuckle story: the sweetest little voice on the phone called asking about getting married here. I usually say congratulations and then enter into a survey type conversation. “So, what brings you to SVF for your wedding?” (Remember that one half of our weddings, baptisms, and funerals are non-parishioners.) Continuing in an even sweeter voice she told me that as a little girl going to Johnnies for lunch she always saw the limousines lined up in front of the church and dreamed one day being married here. I asked if she had ever been in the church and she said no. She explained that she was not catholic nor her intended. She was very understanding when I explained we did not rent out the church as an event building.

**The G club** the G stands for generic. These folks are legion in number. They call themselves catholic but carry it like a credit card to cash in. Both the shriners and the G club are very much into being served. Give me. Entitlement. Church is what I get; giving is not part of their soul’s makeup. This group is sometimes called the “hatched, matched and dispatched” group. Their catechesis of church is that it is a “spiritual” bank to make a withdrawal or a loan. Investment is not part of their catechesis of church. When the Cardinal opened our 75<sup>th</sup> he preached (on the parish website) challenging us to move beyond the generations of receiving sacraments to a church that reaches out and gives. Catechesis causes us to evangelize; to carry the Word. In the services that the G Club requests, they are offended and indignant at catechesis. They often have their priest, time, and particulars all ready to be accommodated. When informed of the teachings of the Church in a given doctrine or guideline, they dismiss the catechist and want a “sacrament on demand”. Because of the sheer volume of the shriners and the G club, the staff spends much of their hours with these souls. This means the lion’s share of staff time is with people that will not be seen again—or at least until they want something else.

Two mandates were given me when I became pastor that can surface in any of the above 7 story mountain. The first mandate was to renew the parish spiritually. The second was to make certain all were treated alike and to stop the favoritism. I see the two mandates as one. I also see their action in the catechesis of sacramental

life. In our Roman tradition we need not apologize for our sacramental life. Good catechesis can be trusted. This is our core to fairness and our spiritual renewal blueprint.

## **Parish Department Reports**

This report now moves to the staff particulars of catechesis. Each staff person has a clear perspective to share in SVF faith development in just this last year. There are constant upgrades and improvements to our SVF life. Sometimes they are not always obvious because each of us sees only a small piece of what we call parish. Let's look back over the last year naming our changes and growth in grace:

### **Liturgy as catechesis- Steve Senski, Director of Worship**

As part of their pre-ceremony catechesis, engaged couples preparing for a SVF wedding see a video detailing the Roman Catholic wedding rite. At the video's conclusion, the presider/narrator speaks directly to couples in the audience, advising them to "trust the rites." That advice applies to all liturgical celebrations at SVF, but it is challenging to achieve. Our worship can easily become the carton of eggs at the bottom of the shopping bag; pile too much on top of it, and...

"Less is more" is an old adage, but liturgy is well-served when it is observed. That means careful, prayerful attention to detail, as well as an acknowledgement – and celebration – of the fact that we possess all the requirements for worship within our parish family. To this end, in the last year:

- We have renewed our commitment to keep our Sacramental celebrations the prayerful experiences they need and deserve to be. We have made great strides in keeping SVF weddings and funerals from being overwhelmed by elements that are not part of the Roman Catholic rite. This last year our Confirmation and First Eucharist celebrations moved beyond "productions," becoming occasions for heartfelt, inclusive worship, and in 2006-07, we will turn our attention to parish baptisms;
- We have empowered our young people by having our Youth Band become the primary musical resource for major parish celebrations, as well as providing regular music for weekend Masses. This breaks with a long-standing tradition of hiring outside performers who may have no emotional or spiritual connection to our faith family. We have also re-introduced the Children's Choir by emphasizing their familiarity with the music for the Mass, as well as their role as leaders of the assembly;
- We have taken the necessary steps to re-create the Music Space within the church so as to allow musicians to be part of the worshiping assembly. We are presently examining the feasibility of a second organ located in this space, so as to allow all music to originate from one localized area;
- We have given additional attention to School Masses in order that they integrate more closely into the worship life of the parish. School kids assume

- responsibility for certain liturgical roles at one Sunday Mass a month. Continuing to develop this relationship will be a major priority for 2006-07.
- We have continued our development of all liturgical ministers through catechesis and workshops, culminating in a blessing and re-commissioning rite for them on Pentecost Sunday. "Hospitality" becomes the watchword for all ministers during the coming year. Out of these workshops, we will be creating a Worship Committee that will address larger issues regarding the quality of our community's prayer.

Get two liturgists together in a room, and within five minutes they will be exchanging either fisticuffs or ideas: "Well, at MY parish we do THIS..." They will extol the virtues of their new baptistery, which doubles as their brazier for Holy Saturday, and can also be used as a slow-cooker for the annual parish chili dinner. In an culture that exalts the acquisition of the newest, biggest and brightest, it's tempting to yield to this impulse, even in liturgy ("Our parish has the Second Edition of *Gather Comprehensive*, hot off the press. Does yours?") However, our faith family should rejoice that, in recent months, we have received accolades from both visiting laity and clergy, all the way to the highest reaches of the Archdiocese. They have commended us for our adherence to the rites, our liturgical attention to detail, and the honesty and vitality of our prayer. That is only achieved through trusting those rites, tested and refined down through the centuries, their eloquence growing with time. That trust, like the trust we place in the Lord, is never unfounded.

### **Stewardship Catechesis- Jean Finnegan, Business Administrator**

Treasure follows Time and Talent . . . As we invest our time in catechesis and share our talents within our church we will build a stronger Catholic community. What follows is a need for more programs and outreach. Treasure will follow to support this mission.

In this last year a new committee was formed that will review buildings and grounds issues, both current and long term. What will the physical campus of SVF be in 50 years? ...75 years? This committee is a subcommittee of the parish Finance Board. The continued support of our building fund collection will aid in supporting these needs. Requests in our bulletin for designated money continue to be successful. An estate planning workshop was held last fall. This workshop was very well attended and informative. We will continue to offer planning workshops periodically. We were very graced at SVF to have received some generous donations and estate bequests. As a result we continue to stay current with our debt repayment as well as our daily operating expenses despite decreased Sunday collections.

We continue in the business office to work hard as good stewards of parish finances. Implementation of Archdiocesan Best Practices is a priority and will continue to be a priority. Our goal for the year to come is to provide the parish with more reports regarding our financial position such as actual and budget goals that are now being reported in our weekly bulletin.

### **Catechizing in Technologies- Fr Albert Judy, OP, Webmaster**

Information technologies of the new age are in use by the parish to assist the ministries of the staff individually and collectively, and as a way of sharing our story with the parish and to the world. In the past year these strides forward have been taken. 1. A new central server and number of new staff computers have been added to the office network, each running the latest system and software. 2. We have purchased a major upgrade to the **Parish Data System**, the parishioner database software program. We are just beginning to take advantage of its new features. 3. A new digital projector and DVD/video deck were bought adding to our audio-visual tools. 4. The parish website continues to grow in popularity. It is now used extensively to share wedding and funeral resources, as well as to chronicle parish activities during the Anniversary year. Plans for improvement in all areas are developing, with hopes of reaching out to the parish families in a more convenient, a more frequent and a more useful way, using e-mail and the internet.

### **Pastoral Care and Social Ministry Catechesis- Fr Michael Kyte, OP**

Pastoral Care is a department that has a staff person assigned to it for the first time. An umbrella for many different areas of outreach, pastoral care is huge in its scope and challenge.

Social Concerns Ministry has been in SVF for many years. These parishioners work in aiding the needy through transportation, housing and food aid. The challenge before us is that we need new leadership. Many of our social concerns ministers are seniors who give endless hours each week. But without new members this important ministry will not be able to continue. Anyone that is interested should contact Father Michael.

The Ministry to the Homebound continues to grow. We have very dedicated EMC's (Extraordinary Ministers of Communion) but again, we need more volunteers. A home visit and an experience of the sacrament is a graced time for these folks connecting them to the parish.

Our parish has had an active role in Respect for Life. We have volunteers at the Women's Center and others who help in fundraising for Respect Life programs.

Our school children have become involved with the Heifer Project which provides services to the needy in developing countries. They also have raised money to help school children in Iraq taught by Dominican Sisters.

We also have been very involved with our sister parish St. Pius, a Dominican parish in the Pilson neighborhood. Each year we provide money and services to the parish and share Mass and celebration twice during the year. The Pius Room in the back of church is always gathering clothing and goods for the St Pius people.

Catholic Charities is the major pastoral care resource providing a wealth of services. It is important for us to know what is offered by the Archdiocese especially in terms of senior housing and programs for troubled families.

There are other areas of challenge in Pastoral Care. Catholic parishes are seen as voices for the voiceless and the marginalized in society. Particularly pressing areas needing healthy Catholic catechizing are immigration, life issues, just war, informed voting, etc. Our faith is alive through action. We bring the social gospel to the world by our presence to those most in need. Cardinal George

preaching here at SVF on Epiphany Sunday launching our 75<sup>th</sup> made it clear that a parish is not just where we receive sacraments. From what we are given we must give to others.

### **Faith Formation is Catechesis- Karen Dix, Director of Faith Formation**

Catechesis – literally the echo of God’s word from one to another – is happening all the time at SVF! Our school classrooms and hallways abound with Catholic symbols, while religion teachers share their faith with our children. Retreat days and special liturgies offer students a time to reflect on God’s work in their lives. Parent Sacramental meetings include both spiritual and practical applications for use in the home. Baptism and Marriage preparation spell out our Catholic Church’s teachings on how to live our lives. The Confirmation program gives our young adolescents a framework to launch them into adult discipleship and ministry. Adult education programs try to bring deeper understanding of church teachings and timely topics to those beyond the classroom days. Pamphlets, handouts and websites offer concise information on the wide scope of our Catholic Church.

All of this describes the most formal programs, including religion textbooks and lessons. Beyond this, we know that the greatest way to teach about our faith is to live it. Research has shown that the “person of the catechist” is the greatest influence. So for all of us who attempt to teach the faith, in formal programs or in church or in our homes, in the end it is our witness which sparks the spirit. If they see us be reverent, if they know we are people of prayer, if they see us make moral choices, then – and only then- will they too follow Christ.

There is one model of catechesis above all which our Church promotes. That is the model of the catechumenate, the RCIA process. In this model, people come to faith through questions, conversion and discipline. The Scriptures used at Mass become the textbook, and the parish community becomes the catechist. The candidates and catechumens (*those seeking Baptism*) are drawn to our shared Christian life and desire to become fully immersed as a full member. It is a process of stages, taking the time needed to be fully ready. It is a decision, not an automatic result of going to so many classes. It is the ideal way all Sacraments would be approached, but not yet fulfilled.

### **Youth Catechized in Christ- Patrick Curran, Director of Youth Ministries**

The 2005-2006 year ushered in a new hope for catechesis for the teens of SVF. In the last nine months, our parish youth ministry, *Christ’s Disciples Now* (XDN), has established itself and begun tilling and planting new ground, with some seeds already sprouting. XDN [pronounced kīe(“chī”)- dēe - en] seeks to enhance and expand the faith opportunities for SVF’s teens, catechizing continuously, both with texts and with life experiences. We are constantly empowering teens to take on leadership roles in our Sunday worship, evident by their growing presence and their gifts of energetic and lively worship. New service opportunities have also been made available this year, challenging our teens to find Christ among his people. A special highlight of these opportunities is our first service mission trip to south-eastern Appalachia, in Copperhill, TN. Here, a group of our 8<sup>th</sup> graders and their parents learn what it means to “put your faith in action” as we serve God’s people

by helping to build homes and by learning about the lives and needs of Copperhill residents.

With some important groundwork started, we look ahead to this coming year where our focus will shift to the direct target of the ministry: development of faith opportunities for high school teens. This includes catechesis in many areas, such as liturgy and service, but also in Scripture, social justice, prayer and Christian leadership. These opportunities enable teens to bring their real-life experiences into conversation with an active and maturing Catholic faith. Hopefully, we can empower our young people to answer the questions, “Why/How should I exist as a young Catholic in today’s world?”

High School Youth Ministry at SVF is a fairly new ministry, as it is in the Church at large. This reality means that we as a parish have much self-catechesis to do, learning about youth ministry and asking, “What roles do each of us fill?” Despite popular belief, youth ministry is not only for teens – it might be targeted to support and nourish teens, but it requires the effort of the entire parish (and also promises to benefit the entire parish). I do believe that by working together we can establish and sustain fruitful and effective faith opportunities for our teens, providing a place for them to bring life’s greatest joys and life’s toughest questions. Thank you for your continuous prayers and support throughout this year. I look forward to what the next year will bring, and what graces we will enjoy together in God’s abundant blessing.

### **Schools Catechizing Catholic Excellence -Fran Mazzulla, School Principal**

St. Vincent Ferrer School exists primarily to evangelize about the Good News of Jesus Christ and to educate Catholic students for the Church’s mission. Catechesis in many forms occurs on a daily basis.

One very important belief shared by the faculty and staff at St. Vincent Ferrer School is that parents are the first educators of their children. This then translates into the strong conviction that parents are also their children’s first catechists. The parents’ role in their children’s faith formation is nurtured and viewed as ongoing. It is reinforced by the school community in a variety of ways. Parents are not only encouraged to be present at children’s liturgies but also to sit with their children as a testament to their own faith.

Teachers stress the importance of Sunday worship and the pivotal role of the family unit in its participation. Several prayer services occur throughout the year to mark important liturgical events. Parents often are not only in attendance but participate.

Within the classroom, catechesis occurs daily. Each day begins and ends with prayer. In addition to the monthly all school liturgies, children have opportunities to participate in weekly classroom/grade level liturgies. The liturgical cycles of the Church year focus the daily classroom prayer and liturgies. There is a significant presence of religious art in classrooms and corridors. There is a prayer center, or sacred space in every classroom.

There is a strong commitment to daily religion classes; religion is never eliminated in the scheduling. Homilists and teachers attempt to match themes to religion themes or student/classroom concerns. The Archdiocese has issued a new religion curriculum. This will be implemented across grade levels.

Gospel values remain the core of the school's entire curriculum and are taught in every class. The emphasis on these values encompasses daily activity in halls, playground, and lunchroom. Students are taught to be respectful of others with race and nationality not being problematic, relational issues. An anti-bullying campaign has been in force for the last two years. Student assemblies focus on the anti-bullying theme, and a specific program employing videos, classroom activities, discussion and a home connection has been implemented.

The mission at St. Vincent Ferrer School is to live the Catholic faith and to form the students to live the faith. Responsibility for one another as a community is stressed. Children take on the role of catechists in the Faith Partner Program. Older children are responsible for younger ones. Older children are paired with younger children and each child has a faith partner. The pairing is as follows: Eighth with second, seventh with first and full time Kindergarten, sixth with fourth, and fifth with third. The eighth graders and second graders share a special connection since they both receive sacraments throughout the year. Many activities occur during which the faith partners interact with each other. They are together at all the school liturgies so the older partner can guide and instruct the younger child in proper participation. Examples of other activities are: participating and developing prayer services, working on specific projects, attending field trips, helping write letters, and reading to each other. The relationship between partners is very special. The older student is a spiritual guide and has the responsibility of teaching that our actions revolve around the teachings of Jesus. Many significant and important relationships have developed through this program.

**Rebuilding Society: Catechizing the family through the Sacramental preparation of matrimony and baptism- Deacon John and Kathy Gaughan**

The state of the parish report describes the several different connections, levels of attachment or belonging that parishioners have to SVF parish. The young adults we meet in marriage preparation and the young parents we see at Baptism preparation could be described in terms of these same levels of faith knowledge and practice.

A large number of couples looking forward toward marriage at SFV have only a tangential relationship with the parish from some past experience or connection. The SVF couples who meet with our engaged couples talk to them about the joys as well as the challenges of a good marriage. Our SVF couples open their homes to meet with engaged couples. Since we christened this ministry in January of 2005, our lead couples, SVF parishioners who are trained FOCCUS facilitators, have met with 35 couples in marriage preparation. We try to have with the young couple the conversations the engaged should have, but often do not have with their parents. We tell them how helpful it has been to us to let God into our lives, to pray and to go to Mass together. We tell them that they are giving each other the sacrament, that each of them is a sign to the other of God's love. We review with the couple the results of their FOCCUS surveys and emphasize continued honesty and selflessness. We tell them that the Church wants them to have a happy and holy marriage and that sex is a great gift they share. We remind them to be grateful to God for what brought them together.

Couples with whom we work in sacramental preparation, whether marriage or Baptism, come to us at times of crossroads in their lives. Our SVF couples know this and know how important these opportunities for catechizing and evangelization can be. The couples involved in Baptism preparation know that we want our young parents to pass on the faith to their children, but that we often have to teach them – catechize them – so that they can do this. In the short time we have with our new parents, we ask the young parents to express why they are asking for Baptism for their little ones. We encourage them and we congratulate them on their taking this important step for their children. We discuss the role of the sacraments in our lives as Catholics and explain how God comes to us in the sacraments, how through the sacraments, God gives us the graces we need at these important times in our lives. The SVF couples conducting Baptism preparation classes are consistently inviting the new parents to practice their faith so that their children can see them as models of a good Catholic life. We encourage them to come to Mass and to bring their children with them.

The couples who work in sacramental preparation at SVF know that many of the young couples who come for Matrimony or Baptism might look on the Church primarily as a giver of the sacraments, a provider of services of a religious nature. Our SVF couples understand that the services are there so that we can catechize and evangelize. The sacraments provide an opportunity for us to reach out. Providing the sacraments or services is our ministry, but our purpose, our mission, is to catechize and evangelize, to help the people who come to us become better Catholics, better persons, better parents, transform themselves so that they, in turn, can transform others.

This has been an area of growth in grace. Our SVF couples do what they are doing not only because catechizing the inactive Catholic or encouraging the sometime Catholic is their ministry, but because they realize that this helps them convert themselves. Each of our wonderful couples involved in marriage or Baptism preparation tells us how truly rewarding the experience is. These couples see themselves as disciples in the parish calling others to fuller involvement in the parish and the Church. This is the goal of catechizing the family through the sacramental preparation.

### **Catechesis in the Sunday Bulletin- David Garcia, Bulletin Editor**

Our bulletin is huge by comparison to the other parishes in our cluster. It is more than a bulletin; it is a catechesis tool of simple week in and week out realities of our faith. For example: rather than printing just Ascension Sunday/Thursday details, our bulletin explains the feast and the season. The filter for content for the bulletin is the same as for the calendar (see below). The amount of space allocated per article is based on the connection to the parish.

**The SVF Calendar—structuring the spaces for catechesis to happen:**  
**Mary Ann Trakszelis**

A common calendar is a necessity for a system like SVF parish to operate well. Teaching all groups and organizations to communicate to one source has been a real teaching moment. Communicating the space reservation priority system is difficult. The SVF priority method is as follows:

**1<sup>st</sup> Priority - Sacramental**

Church, Holy Days, Penance Services, Baptisms, Confirmation, Novenas, Wedding Workshops, R.C.I.A., Art & Environment, etc.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Priority – Parish Organizations & Committees**

Parish School, Parish School of Religion, Youth Ministry, Parish Council, School Board, Faith Formation Board, Marketing Committee, Finance Committee, etc.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Priority – Other groups and organizations within the parish**

Parents' Club, Athletic Board, Market Day, Seniors, Bible Studies, Prayer Groups, Book Club, Italian Catholic Federation, Men's Group, Women's Group, etc.

**4<sup>th</sup> Priority – Non-parish groups and organizations**

O.P. Laity, AA, Naim, Chicago Diaconate, etc.

Creating the structure works best by using a long range planning form. Creating and teaching this structure is the present process. This will all be updated into higher technology in the coming year.

**...and in conclusion:** Focusing on catechesis in this annual parish report may seem somewhat flat or only two dimensional. If you go back over the last State of the Parish reports, you will notice a call to structure. Catechesis is structure.

Here at SVF we have identified ourselves or been identified as “I did it my way”. If we did things different from the rest of the church, we would call it the “Dominican Rite” in a tongue-in-cheek sort of way. We follow the same guidelines as the universal church and the Archdiocese. We can trust the Roman rites of the sacraments and their catechesis. They do not disappoint if we are serious about Jesus and His Gospel. This can mean when we think that “we’ve always done it this way”, we may have not been functioning with the fullest catechesis of the church.

Going back to the call to reflect: For the elders among us we remember a time before there were all these classes for each sacrament. Wedding preparation was signing the papers with the priest in the office; baptism was just setting the date. Because of the neglect and abuse of sacraments, the Second Vatican Council introduced adult catechesis for everyone and all sacraments. Learning can be enjoyable as the Church of Christ becomes more informing to our daily lives.

Catechesis is for everyone. We all want wiggle room to not follow the directives, guidelines, or canons. “Father, the website on all that stuff with marriage is great, but this is my wedding.” Catechesis is for the common good even when we prefer exemption. Many times we want to privatize the sacraments. People actually use that word in requesting a “private” baptism, or other sacrament. The

sacraments of our church need catechesis to protect them. We have all experienced the “informed catholic” who starts spouting off rules of the Church in marriage, but their information is incorrect. Many Catholics are functioning with the catechetical education of a child, for that is when they stopped learning about their faith. But we are a complex Church with two millennia of faith history.

The structures of the Church will not make us holy. Catechesis is not rigid, stuffy or burdensome. It leads us in a holy direction. The most important catechesis is to have an informed conscience. That is the work of a lifetime. A catechized conscience is our ultimate Roman Catholic vocation.

This overview of the parish as a catechetical family reflects the reality of the Church at large. Pope Benedict XVI has just catechized the greater church with his encyclical *Deus caritas est — God is love*. In our world where we see love as mostly passionately physical, the Holy Father reminds us that we are called to more. As a catechist, Benedict XVI urges us to let the love of God, made manifest in the person and life of Jesus, be the guide for our lives and interactions as Church. All of us are already catechizing by our actions. May we as a parish family enjoy that call of Jesus the teacher to seek God at all levels of who we are, and who we are becoming.

Lovingly,  
Thomas D. Noesen, O.P.  
Pentecost Sunday 2006