



Parish Heartbeats: Stories of Faith In Action

“Honk if you love catechists”

There’s a bumper sticker that says “If you can read this, thank a teacher.” One Catholic version might say “If you know Jesus loves you, thank your catechist.” In the faith lives of most Catholics there has been a religion teacher who shared this basic idea that forms the foundation for all other tenets of the faith: “God made you and He loves you”. For the past 5 years, the 4-year-olds of this parish have heard that message from the smiling face of Vicki McLennan.

Vicki and her family have been members of St. Margaret Mary Parish for the past 11 years. As a busy mom of 2 boys and an active Scout leader, Vicki wasn’t looking for another volunteer activity when she went to sign up her kids for RE classes 5 years ago. While registering, the Director of Religious Education asked her if she had ever considered being a catechist. They really needed someone to teach the pre-school class on Sunday morning. As Vicki says now “I found out that day that you can’t say no to God or Sue Davey!”



Vicki was initially concerned about how she would do with the curriculum. She hadn’t gone through Catholic schools herself and it had been a number of years since her own time in RE classes! “I soon realized that one of the benefits of being a catechist is the ability to learn along with the kids. The RE office provides all the materials you need – a binder full of ideas, lesson plans, and a teacher manual. All activities are age- appropriate and all the materials you need for crafts are in the well-stocked supply room.”

Through her work as a catechist, Vicki has found an increased sense of belonging and fellowship within the St. Margaret Mary Parish community. “There are over 100 catechists that teach in the K-5 program here,” says Vicki.

“You meet many of them through the annual orientation day in August and see them again at the open houses throughout the year and at Mass on the weekends. I also love seeing the families of my students and enjoy the big hugs from former students who remember the fun they had in my class! I’ve been at it long enough now that I’m teaching siblings of my original students and watching the older ones celebrate new faith milestones.”

The time commitment is minimal: RE classes last for an hour each week and are taught in the Parish classrooms. Most teachers spend an hour preparing for the lesson at their convenience during the week and many classrooms have co-catechists, which shares the burden between two teachers. And as many of the catechists could attest, that little bit of time can have a lasting influence on the lives of the children.

Many catechists move grade levels each year as their children age but some feel a particular calling to stay with one grade. Vicki’s contagious enthusiasm and boundless energy is a great match for the 4-year-olds and she enjoys seeing our faith through their eyes. She has continued to expand her role in the RE program by leading the Good Friday service for children and volunteering in the Vacation Bible School program. “I feel renewed in my faith from my time as a catechist. It led me to participate in the Christ Renews His Parish retreat and other adult formation activities. I feel valued by the families and by the parish. This is the perfect match for me.”

There is always a need for catechists! You do not need to have children in the program to participate. For more information, please contact Sue Davey, Director of Religious Education at (630) 369-0833.

- written by Cabrina Attal

Parish Heartbeats is an occasional bulletin column that celebrates the ways St. Margaret Mary parishioners make a difference in the lives of others.