

## Key Values of Whole Parish Faith Formation (WPF)

There are many names for what we, as catechetical leaders, do. Simply put, we form people in faith. There are many ways to do this, many models, many methodologies. Each one is based on a specific set of values. If you think about the classroom instruction model, you can begin to imagine what values were in place driving its creation.

Whole Parish Faith Formation or WPF is the name the REO has given those models that form people in faith with the whole community gathered at the same time. Examples of popular models include Generations of Faith and Whole Community Catechesis. The purpose of this article is to discuss the values underlying the Whole Parish Faith Formation approach to catechesis in an effort to dispel some of the misinformation about it.

It is important to note that instruction is just as much a part of this model as it is in the classroom model. In WPF, think of instruction as an anchor for the rest of the learning process. The learning process in WPF is very different than traditional models because it is built upon the values discussed below. The WPF model embraces the following values:

1. **Lifelong** WPF recognizes first and foremost that faith formation is a life-long process. It is not an age group-specific program with a definitive enrollment and exit time. While most catechetical leaders agree wholeheartedly with the value of lifelong faith formation, many traditional models do not have a high success rate in retaining learners at each, next programmatic age-level of formation beyond eighth grade.

2. **Intergenerational** As a lifelong process, WPF values all learners at every stage of the life cycle and the relationships that form between them. In a culture where multiple generations of family typically do not live in the same location, these intergenerational relationships are extremely important to the learning process and thus, highly valued.

This value also emphasizes the critical importance of forming adults in their faith. By including adults of all ages in the learning process, WPF actively seeks to engage adults in continuing faith formation. The working assumption is that adults more fully formed in their faith will be better equipped to pass that faith on to the younger generations.

Finally, this value recognizes the diverse set of circumstances facing people today. Using a term such as households to describe those who participate reinforces that all are welcome, from the traditional family, to the senior citizen, to the single young adult, etc.

3. **Gathered** This learning process relies on having the faith community gathered at the same time to experience the same formation, as opposed to separating the age groups across the year for independent learning. Learning with the community that worships together is an extremely

high value in WPFf which could not happen in the same way if age groups always met for independent learning. In parishes where space will not allow the entire faith community to gather at one time, multiple gathering times should be offered, similar in concept to a parish having multiple worship times to accommodate their parishioners.

4. **Core Curriculum** Imagine having the ability to teach all of the learners in a parish the same concepts at the same time. This is the value of a Core Curriculum. When the intergenerational faith community of lifelong learners is gathered together as a learning community, they learn and grow in faith together. The topic for a given week or month is THE catechetical topic for the faith community and parish leadership can count on that as they develop programming in other areas. An example of this might be the priests incorporating this topic in their homilies in some way.
5. **Participation** WPFf seeks to help form the faithful in such a way that they will be better able to participate in the life of their faith community. Through growing in understanding about the topic, by forming relationships with other people, and sharing faith in new ways, the participants of the learning sessions will be better prepared to participate in the faith life of the parish. Not only will they understand what is going on in their faith communities more fully, they will be able to experience it with people they have built faith relationships with.
6. **Whole Parish** WPFf is the primary catechetical program for the entire parish. No ministries run programs that conflict with it and every ministry participates in it. Deviation from this value, however slight, undermines the success of WPFf. In fact, not adhering to this value is why so many parishes have experienced difficulty implementing the Generations of Faith approach. It truly requires a paradigm shift in the parish.
7. **Value Added** Doing a WPFf model does not preclude the possibility of other age-group specific ministries or programming. These simply “spin off” of the WPFf dynamic. The key is that ministries do not recreate what WPFf has already done, but enhance it. Think of these ministries as ways for parishioners to live out what they are learning in WPFf.

Each of the values named above work together to create the WPFf model. If a parish embraced one or two of these values (which many do), it would not automatically translate into a WPFf model. Just like the classroom instructional methodology was created to serve a specific set of values, so was WPFf. Understanding the purpose of each of these values and seeing how they inter-relate with one another is the first step of assessing whether or not a WPFf model might hold value for your parish. The next issue will explore, “Why Make the Switch?”