

# Discovering the power of faith formation programs

As products of Catholic education ourselves, my husband and I always planned to send our children to Catholic school. When the time came to choose a school for our first child, we visited three Catholic schools and picked the best fit.

From the moment our oldest son started kindergarten, I couldn't believe how wonderful it all was. He brought home these beautiful religion books and liturgically relevant worksheets and rich questions about faith and prayer. There were school Masses and prayers throughout the day and opportunities for reconciliation and Stations of the Cross.

It was everything I had hoped it would be.

When our younger son started there, we continued to love the faith education. But we started realizing that the school might not be the right fit for him academically. Ultimately he received a diagnosis that made it clear that our local public school was better equipped to serve his needs.

I was in denial. For months I prayed for clarity, and then one day I woke up and realized I already had clarity. What I needed was acceptance. I sat at the last Mass of the school year with tears running down my face and realized I wasn't just sad; I was scared.

As much as I was working to integrate our faith into our family life at home, I had always had that safety net of Catholic school. I had felt that faith-wise our boys were getting their bread in school, and we were just spreading on the butter at home. Obviously, we were doing more than the butter, but it was such a natural partnership. We had teammates supporting us in the classroom, and I knew we were all working to do everything we could to help our children grow in faith.

Now we were taking the training wheels off and trying to ride the bicycle completely on our own.

But what I hadn't realized was that when we changed schools, we wouldn't be alone in teaching our sons the Catholic faith. We would enroll our children in faith formation and take them every week. Then somehow I would get pulled into teaching on Sundays, too. Suddenly we had a whole new little community within our faith community that was supporting and strengthening our faith in ways I hadn't expected at all.

As it turns out, we have a whole new team of people supporting our children's faith development. The other teachers who volunteer are extraordinary people who are role models and mentors for our children. The other parents are on journeys similar to ours, trying to ensure that their children grow to love and serve God and make their home in the Catholic Church.

As a teacher—or a small group leader, as our parish calls us which is more accurate with the model we use—I have this opportunity to connect with the children in our group and with my fellow teacher, who is a good friend and prayer partner. Helping other children learn and grow in our faith is a challenge, but one I welcome. Their questions—like my own sons'—press me to know and explain my own beliefs more fully.

Now, here we are, on Catechetical Sunday, just a little more than a year after that daunting transition. We may still be a little wobbly without those training wheels, but I've come to see we are doing just fine. I am so very grateful to our parish and the catechists who care so deeply about our children's faith. I am grateful to the parents who allow me to partner with them in their children's faith education. We are a community in this, working together to help these children grow in their love and understanding of Jesus.

So this wasn't the path we had planned to take, but it has been a positive one. And I am in awe of how this unexpected twist in the road has led us on a journey that has introduced us to a beautiful community and a chance to grow in our faith in new ways.