

Video from Kenn deMoll - Fr. Paul Turner – historical context of Confirmation - <https://vimeo.com/894546102>

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Pilot Parish Presentation – St. John, Westminster – Kenn Demoll

St. John, Westminster, is in their second year of the Confirmation age nine pilot program. They run two programs for Confirmation Preparation, one for age 9-13, and the other for age 13 and up. The parish is bi-lingual.

What was looked at for planning pilot program

- intentional target of families with nine year olds and their parents
- They found the sacrament preparation process to be frustrating and wanted to do things differently; make more exciting and engaging
- wanted to get away from a process of things to get done; wanted to help families grow more spiritually
- looked at what parent resources could be offered; How can metrics be met and matched for growing spiritually?
- Why sports? Because parents can see growth and watch their kids grow; Spiritual growth is hard to gage.

Structure of pilot program

- meet once a month for six months – total six preparation sessions; each session is two hours
- schedule of session: together: meal, play game (Kahoot), short introduction of the topic
Separate: parents, age-specific catechesis bring back together, pray
- They find that parents want to help their children but struggle with how; give parents those resources
- They create all their own resources; have used Enkindle Catholic for help
- for parents the focus is on how to share their faith and listening to each others stories; Enkindle Catholic resources help with this.

-Kids learn by doing and with hands-on resources. What can we have them do, make and experience? Ex: For topic of What is Confirmation, they made tie dye t-shirts with a religious theme. This taught the “indelible mark” of Confirmation.

Biggest Success

-They used an assesment tool for spiritual growth three times. Each time it showed growth over this time period, especially for parents.

-This is not only about lowering the age of Confirmation, but what does the Lord want us to do and create? What does He want us to do for them after their Confirmation?

Pushbacks

-They definitely have had pushbacks from the Parish, Hispanic, and School communities.

-There has been a split in all the communities on both ends of the spectrum (this is a terrible idea to I can see this idea working)

-School community challenged nine year olds being mature enough for Confirmation

-There response – If seven year olds mature enough to receive First Eucharist why not Confirmation?

Additional Comments

-Faith Formation sessions are made available to all.

-They did not mandate the pilot program – made it optional

-It is imporant to have clear and advanced communication

First Breakout Session – Pilot - St. John, Westminster – Kenn DeMoll

Question and Answer Session

How were school teachers involved in this pilot program?

It has been a voluntary process with the school. Teachers are asked if they would like to be part of a session. Parish staff leads sessions but school teachers can assist.

They have been actively encouraging parents to do this program. The school is smaller so it has been easier to have conversations. I have talked to teachers and on back to school nights.

What have you found to be a good day and time to meet for this pilot program?

It has been difficult to find a time good for everyone because of the Sunday Mass schedule. Sunday afternoons from 12:15 to 2:15 has worked best, however, this is not a convenient time and especially not convenient for the Hispanic community (the Spanish Mass is 1:00 p.m.). We hope next year to make the sessions earlier.

Have you done any retreats?

The first year we wanted to have an experience for families instead of a retreat. We planned several things; trip to Emmitsburg, First Fruits Farm, Sight and Sound theatre. We did not do any of them. We maxed out; burned out.

The second year we wanted to plan a day retreat. This would take place of one of the sessions. It was hard to find a date for this so it went by the wayside. We hope to plan one for next year.

Does your First Eucharist Preparation and Confirmation Preparation mirror each other?

Both focus on spending time encountering and sharing faith and not just checking off the boxes and having things to do. Needing to have lifelong faith formation is explained in both.

How they both operate are different from each other.

What is the name of the assessment tool that you used for families?

I am not sure of the name, it was recommended by Dr. Ximena DeBroeck. I can look it up and give the name to Rena. We did look at 4 or 5 different ones. The wording was important to us. The one we used was on a scale of 1 to 5. We did develop a personality quiz for parents and I can share that.

What failed and what are some things not to do.

Do not work 80 hrs. per week for 8 weeks. Don't put too much in the content. We had so many good ideas but less is more. We had to prune out and focus on one or two.

We have set up small groups for parents. They have check-ins each month on how they are doing with their goals and growth in faith.

What do you do when families don't attend or can't attend?

We created an at-home session. We send home the teaching and we set up a Zoom for a touch base before the next session. When we do this Zoom session we make sure we ask the question how are you doing and we pray with them.

How many are in the pilot program, what about Bi-Lingual?

The first year we had 50 children (100 total with parents). This was made up of families with nine year olds and older siblings who wanted to prepare for Confirmation. This year we have 30 children (60 total with parents). We are moving toward 9 – 12 year old process.

We have a bi-lingual coordinator and we use tech for translation. We recruited a Spanish speaking adult to help with the Spanish in Zooms. All parent material is offered in Spanish.

We developed all our material and resources. We reached out to Enkindle Catholic for help. One of the first questions asked was, what is the Church to you and how do you see your role in it? We are moving away from content driven material to offering great experiences of faith that cultivate the heart.

Will the Bishop Confirm and are you requiring letters to the Bishop?

Yes, the Bishop will confirm, and the high school program requires letters but not the nine year old program.

What are you doing for after Confirmation for the pilot group?

We continue with Youth Ministry. We develop dynamic, engaging programming that they want to do. We continue offering retreats.

We have three programs that meet weekly: Odyssey – Elementary Gr; Edge – Middle School; Life Teen – High School - children/youth are invited to participate

We have done away with classroom model learning. We model more after VBS.

We are looking at doing more with Adult Formation.

There is a need to work more with Confirmation sponsors. We are looking at a Sponsor only program and making it more mainstream.

Notes from breakout room of St. Agnes Church – Regina Oesterle

Parents read book “In the School of the Holy Spirit”.

Encourage encounter.

Fun lesson at end.(i.e. Sparklers to show helping others catch the spirit)

Questions

Carrie Hilmer - Really loved the dinner & Catechesis ideas

- Is prayer at end?
 - o Regina: Prayer in small individual sessions to be age appropriate
- When is your program?
 - o Regina: September through May
- So is it one stop shop?
 - o Regina: All happening in the one stop shop -they are small.

Laura Weatherton – How do you have separate faith formation and sacramental preparation?

Regina:

- Families come once a month & year of Sacramental Prep, child is pulled out.

Lindsay Dierkes - What are you doing at Home?

Regina: Rooted – too much information – do not recommend

Carrie - Is it in a box?

Regina: Yes, Rooted is in a box.

Lisa Hack – how big is your parish?

Regina: really small parish 500 families

When do you have Time?

Regina: Once a month on Wednesday 6pm-9pm

- o ages 1-3 Child Care
- o ages 4-6 Catechesis of the Good Shepherd
- o ages 7-8 First Communion prep
- o ages 9- Confirmation prep

Kelly Guest from St. Barthomew recommended Family of Faith as a resource

Someone asked: How do you pay for food?

Regina:

- Provide main part of meal
- Everyone brings side

Karen Dietz – commented that she uses “Good will donations” box to help with your meetings

Olivia (Cathedral) – How many catechists do you need each month?

Regina:

- 2 Catechists are in each prep
- Ask volunteers for one session then they usually come back again.

Jennifer (St. Mark)- What do you do if multiple children in a family, how do parents do all?

Regina:

- All classrooms have no desk.
- Engaging & interactive activities
- Parents go to Holy Hour & teaching session
 - o How do you develop a prayer life?
 - o Book with discussion

Carrie – what resources that you use for parents?

Regina:

- Practical things with your family

- Eucharistic Miracles
- Speakers

Kate (me) – what do you do if they miss a session?

Regina:

- Take home (develop with family a timeline)
- Not developed yet.

Jennifer – what about returning parents?

Regina:

- Have not thought about repeating

Lindsay Dierkes - Would it better to do First Eucharist & First Reconciliation back-to-back years?

Regina:

-It would be great if it was back-to-back but maybe families need a break.

Becky Needham – comments:

- Up to family (parents) – Sacramental preparation in age & not grade – guidance says start at age 9
- Make space for readiness

Becky Needham – what are your costs?

Regina:

- Family \$50 per child
- donation box at every meal

??? - What materials do you use for students?

Regina:

- Combination – Dynamic Catholic Chosen, Enkindle Catholic, & Information from Speakers & their talk

St. Patrick Havre de Grace Pilot Breakout – Abby Walton

- ❖ St. Patrick is a small parish and a pastorate with St. Joan of Arc
- ❖ Currently offering Confirmation to 4/5 graders and middle school/high school
- ❖ Sessions for the younger children are age appropriate (not watered down) included games & service
- ❖ Time between pastor announcing the change to executing the change was about 3 months
- ❖ Team effort involving all of the staff and families involved
- ❖ 46 children confirmed the 1st year, numbers are less this year since it's mainly the 4th graders
- ❖ **Staffing** – 8 paid staff and 6 volunteers (2 catechists /class ;volunteers are mostly 20-30 yo); the Coordinator of Religious Ed is responsible for faith formation, sacramental prep, youth ministry

Resources

- St. Mary's Press' "Go Seek and Find" Confirmation pack for the 4/5th graders
- Ascension Press's Chosen: Your Journey to Confirmation for the middle school/high school
- Dynamic Catholic's Decision Point for older high school/college

Meeting/Gatherings

- Three classes(4/5th, middle school, high school)
- 4/5th and middle school met 2x month
- High school met 1x month
- Some sessions were also done at home

Initial Response to the age change

- Parishioners had to see the change through its 1st year to trust that it would work

Wins

- Unified effort to evangelize
- Kids are involved in parish/community
- Kids are embracing their faith for themselves, receptive to service

Challenges

- Family schedules
- Parental commitment
- Divorced families

Approach to the challenges

- Using language to encourage parents to commit
- Allow parents/families to commit when they are ready. Work with them where they are in life.
- Hold people accountable without forcing them to do something
- Families that are not ready: interview the child/parent about readiness. The child should not be forced to be confirmed.

The BIG question: Did families stay after Confirmation?

- Saw the most success with the middle school families

Main take-aways

- Evaluate the best approach for your parish, factoring size, facilities, staff
- Accompany the families; meet them where they are, allowing flexibility