

Archdiocese of Philadelphia FORMED “Best Practices” Parish Forum Summary

Twenty-nine people from fourteen parishes attended an Archdiocesan-wide Parish Forum on Friday, November 18 at St. Stanislaus Parish in Lansdale. Eight people were unable to attend at the last minute. Nine parishes were invited to share their “best practices” in using FORMED in one area in their parish. Time was allowed for questions directed to each presenter. Following are summaries of each parish’s presentation.

PARISH PRESENTATION SUMMARIES

Parish: Our Lady of Guadalupe

Topic: Parish-wide Implementation

Presenters: Jessica Walters (DRE) & Anne Kane (Evangelization Committee)

Anne shared how she and Leslie Lippman (both members of the Evangelization Committee) shared about FORMED with their pastor, Msgr Gentili, at a time when they were without a DRE. By the time they had a meeting with him, Msgr Gentili had already checked FORMED out and gave them the “green light” as long as they were willing to do the work to make it happen. When the new DRE came on board (Jessica Walters), she readily embraced and augmented their efforts.

Jessica shared that their first task was to develop a timeline to guide their “launch”; they were guided by the suggestions provided on the FORMED Leader Resource section. They launched during Advent 2015 as follows:

- September to November – Evangelization committee members began meeting with all Ministry and Group leaders (pastoral Council, Knights of Columbus, Pre-Jordan, RCIA, committees, etc.) to get them “on board” first. They met during regularly scheduled meetings and had people use their phones to sign up at the meetings and told them about FORMED.
- November 19 – sent a survey to all parishioners to assess types of programs and formats of interests
- November 28-29 – sent an e-blast with video about FORMED to all parishioners
- December 5-6 – showed FORMED video before all masses
- December 12-13 – launched FORMED at all masses with pulpit announcements and had a “booth” with a large FORMED banner in the narthex with two people for answering questions to create excitement and help people access FORMED.
- December 19-20 – promoted FORMED with a flyer insert. Continued to have volunteers at “booth” in narthex
- Christmas – gave books with a FORMED bookmark with the parish access code to all church-goers
- January/February follow up – sent emails blasts with a FORMED short intro

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- Later, began using Flocknote “Wake Up with the Word on Wednesdays” link to “Opening the Word” on FORMED. This has continued.
- Visually attractive bulletin announcements with specific suggestions to watch/listen to on FORMED are used every week; these are drafted by Leslie Lippman who continues to support FORMED efforts. They created a “Got Formed” announcement using pictures of the OLG priests. They plan to duplicate with pictures of parish staff (this mimics the “Got Milk” ads!) (See attached sample.)
- Weekly Advent ideas will be sent out via email blasts with specific suggestions from FORMED for Advent. (See attached email that is being sent out before 1st Sunday of Advent)

They currently have approximately 350 registered users and have made a goal of 500. They keep FORMED at the forefront of people’s minds. They will include a FORMED bookmark again (with parish access code and instructions) with the book they will give away at Christmas.

Parish: Our Lady of Mt. Carmel

Presenter: Kevin Spillane, parishioner/father who recently returned to Church

Topic: Personal and family use

Kevin shared that he had grown up Catholic but hadn’t had any instruction past the age of 14. His wife is Methodist and he had been going to the Methodist Church with them. At his wife’s urging (and somewhat reluctantly) he went to a Marriage Encounter weekend at Czestochova. It was there that he saw something in the Catholic faith that he wanted to learn more about and he began going back to Mass. He said that he didn’t quite know how to connect and learn more, but he saw “ads” for FORMED in the Parish bulletin. Then he noticed them in the bulletins at other parishes, so he decided to check it out. He said that Symbolon gave him a “game plan” to reenter the Church and to really understand the faith.

His wife has watched some Symbolon episodes in order to understand the Catholic faith a little better. But her favorite is Beloved. Kevin says it’s almost like convenient “therapy” or “counseling”! His children go to the Methodist Church, but they enjoy watching the movies. He’s been able to tie in their Sunday School lesson with a movie to watch.

Kevin suggested that parishes need to show people the value of FORMED....”what’s in it for me”. He continues to use FORMED for his personal faith journey and has become active in evangelization efforts at the parish.

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Parish: St. Agatha/St. James

Presenter: Doug Brintnall, former AFF director & current pre-Cana leader

Topic: Pre Cana

Before using FORMED, the Pre-Cana program sponsored a weekend preparation program (Friday night and all day Saturday). However, because they found many of the Catholic couples were weak in their faith and poorly catechized, the amount of information that needed to be presented was too much for the time allotted. And many came to just “check off the box”. It was also difficult for the Pre-Cana presenters to give up that much time away from their families. FORMED has offered them a successful solution.

Doug developed an online component for Marriage Prep using portions of Beloved and Catholicism. A month before the Pre Cana weekend, they send an e-mail out to the couples and invite them to register on FORMED. Couples are asked to spend about 3 hours a week for 4 weeks before the Pre Cana weekend watching the videos and answering questions from the study guides and on a Google Form. The Google Form hits the important points the Pre-Cana team wants to be sure are addressed. To be able to answer the Google Form questions, the couple has to watch the entire video.

Couples watch (individually or together) Bishop Barron’s Catholicism session 1 and 7 and answer the questions. They also watch Beloved sessions 1 – 3 and answer those questions. During the Pre Cana weekend (which now is just a one-day retreat), the couple will watch session 4 of Beloved and have a Q & A with the Pastor. If it is a mixed marriage, they encourage the non-Catholic to learn about their future spouse’s faith.

The retreat day also includes an NFP component created in consultation with Dr. Les Ruppertsberger and Dr. Monique Ruberu. Half of the couples said they would definitely follow up on NFP.

These efforts have reduced the burden on volunteers and space requirements. They have reduced the cost (one lunch on the weekend instead of two). Now they focus their facilitation on individual meetings with the couples; because the couples have watched the FORMED videos and answered questions prior to the individual meetings, these “mentoring” meetings have been more productive. (See handout.)

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Parish: Nativity of Our Lord

Presenter: Dan Kostrzewa, RCIA leader

Topic: RCIA

Dan shared that Ann Marie Gervino, Nativity’s AFF director, has developed an RCIA schedule using the Liguori Publications program *The Journey of Faith*. Symbolon is used as a supplement to that program. There are 4 to 5 parishioners on the RCIA team; they average 6 candidates a year.

Although both programs (Journey of Faith and Symbolon) provide lessons or sessions in a particular order, Nativity has created their own schedule to take into consideration the Liturgical Year, and their local parish community nuances and needs

RCIA attendees are encouraged to prepare for the weekly session and/or are "assigned homework" to watch the Symbolon resources and review *The Journey of Faith* series in advance, so they can become familiar with the scheduled topic.

This preparation directly promotes facilitation instead of just presentation at the weekly meetings. Dan reports that they typically have lively discussions of the subject matter. Although there may be other factors that contribute to attendees' confidence and willingness to participate in discussion, Dan shared his opinion that Symbolon greatly enhances facilitation and discussion.

Dan also mentioned that their RCIA Team is encouraged to be familiar with multiple resources offered by FORMED, so that they can recommend other video, audio, books, or programs that also relate to subject matter, and will help answer questions introduced by attendees.

Dan also added some personal testimony as a "product of RCIA", since his own confirmation 10 years ago, and his need to continue to learn the Faith. He shared that FORMED is a tremendous personal help and now he is able to share that same journey with current RCIA attendees.

Parish: St. Maximilian Kolbe

Presenter: Roberta Dainton, DRE

Topic: Use in Religious Ed/PREP

Roberta is using the YDisciple Confirmation program for her PREP 6th grade Confirmation program. YDisciple is helping to move the catechists from a presentation model to a facilitating/discussion model. They are encouraging the teachers to be willing to try new things.

Since their class sessions are only 75 minutes and the recommended time for each of the Confirmation sessions is 90 minutes, they take two class sessions for each episode. During class time, they watch a video and have time for discussion using a small group

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format for larger classes. Students have the study guide questions while they watch the video to help them focus and pay attention to what they most need to learn. During the week, the students are asked to do the “Commit” suggestions as their “homework”. Some of the teachers send links with discussion points home to the parents.

Roberta has developed a manual which includes the Leader’s guide, Participant’s page, and Parent page from YDisciple as well as supplemental offerings from other programs on FORMED; she provides all this to each catechist in a 3-ring binder. Because the PREP calendar includes seasonal liturgies, holidays, and sacraments, all this is put together for the teachers. She altered the flow of the YDisciple Confirmation program to match the timetable for Confirmation (depending on the Confirmation Day).

Roberta shared that students are developing Discipleship habits using the “HABITS” acronym which is part of YDisciple. Roberta also shared that she finds a cohesiveness with different programs on FORMED. Since this is accessible at home, they have parents watch with their child and they suggest that parents watch other things as well. This makes the time they have in class more efficient. It’s also helpful if a child has to miss a week as they can view and do the lesson at home.

Roberta did observe that because the ages of those receiving Confirmation straddles a large age group, it’s important to be aware of what material may need more explanation. She gave the example of a mention of “eating disorders” which doesn’t get introduced to students in their regular school curriculum until 8th grade.

Parish: St. Rose of Lima

Presenter: Chris Anderson, Youth & Young Adult Minister

Topic: Youth Ministry

The youth ministry at St. Rose’s is losing kids at the high school level. They now have a Club 6-7-8 to bring middle schoolers together into small groups to prepare them for the high school groups. Currently they aren’t using YDisciple according to the YD model. They meet once a month to view the videos based on a specific topic on YDisciple (Chris Stefanick, Mark Hart, Leah Darrow are particularly effective). The “authority” of the teaching comes from the video rather than from adults in the parish.

They are targeting the middle schoolers now with the intention to prepare them to continue as high schoolers in YDisciple groups in the future.

They are trying to engage parents by handing out FORMED postcards once a week at CYO games and other kids’ events. This is working to pull kids in.

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St. Andrew

Presenters: Dan Tarrant, Youth Ministry & Faith for Life

Laura Rieder, Parishioner & Augustine Institute Parish Consultant

Topic: YDisciple

Dan presented St Andrew’s use of YDisciple via You-tube and emphasized the importance of leading young people into a relationship with Jesus Christ as the first priority. He shared that they started with one group. The Mom and Dad were the “lead parents” for their daughter’s group. These parents presented the idea of YDisciple to their teen and asked if she had friends that would do it. The teens found each other and picked a day and time that worked for them. The parents had a mentor in mind and asked their daughter her thoughts. She picked a different mentor who had to first be approved. Dan shared that it is important for teens to pick their own mentor. They pick one mentor who then picks another mentor who they work well with.

The lead parents take care of everything. They coordinate meeting space, order pizza, etc. The mentors are the same sex of the teens in the group. Parents of the teens are not mentors in their child’s group but can be mentors in other groups.

Everyone has clearances. It takes about 75 days from the introduction to the parents to starting a meeting.

One group of girls didn’t know each other so it took longer for cohesiveness in the group.

Dan said that they use an online Google Doc form to communicate who was at the meeting and if there were any problems with the session (e.g., “Chrome Notebook not working”, “need more supplies”, etc.) and to track progress. If teens aren’t coming, they want to know why so that any problems or needs can be addressed.

They have a file folder for every group. They get the session ready for each group by printing out the parent, leader, and teen sheets and putting them in the folder so everything is ready for the leader to hand out. The groups don’t go in order of the sessions, which is why communication using the Google Doc is important. The groups pick the session that is appropriate for them. The parish tries to make it as effortless as possible for the mentors and parents. A parish needs someone to organize it and support the parent leaders and mentors to make it as easy as possible.

They have 4 living room setups (see photo). Dan said that it is important to make it a comfortable space; it should not be an extension of a classroom.

Currently St Andrew’s has 6 groups and will have 6 more starting soon. Four to five groups of 8th graders (many already in EDGE) will start forming in February. This gives them an opportunity to start thinking about going to Steubenville with their group. These groups will start meeting in March/April and do the 1st Session: Follow Me.

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The recommended group size is 6 – 8 in a group. St. Andrew has 6 – 10. The 8th grade groups will start with 5 so that they can invite friends. They don't have to be parishioners to attend. One boy who was invited by a friend wasn't Catholic but decided to convert and came into the Church during the Easter Vigil 2016.

After graduation, many of the teens still keep in touch. They can decide as a group to meet during college breaks.

They had a big YD picnic at the end of the year. They do a golf outing fundraiser to raise money for youth ministry. The youth ministry fundraisers pay for the pizzas. They also sell sticky buns after Masses a couple of times a year.

Parish: Queen of the Universe

Presenter: Bobby Allen, AFF Director

Topic: RCIA

Bobby shared that Queen of the Universe has really embraced the New Evangelization and seeks to utilize the “access points” – Marriage, baptism, godparents, sacraments, bereavement. At present, they are using FORMED primarily for RCIA, PreCana, and PreJordan. They have also done a *33 Days to Morning Glory* as an online retreat. They use FORMED as a combination of at home and in group viewing. They promote FORMED by posting on the main page of the parish website with the parish code, providing updates on the parish Facebook page, and including weekly announcements provided by the parish consultant in their bulletin. They repeatedly mention in parish groups, ministries, and classes. They have business cards with the FORMED parish code printed up which the priests keep with them to easily refer people to the FORMED website for answers to questions, etc. They are planning to have a pull-up banner made to keep in the church.

Bobby said that deciding to integrate Symbolon into RCIA was a team effort. They first reviewed it amongst key parish decision makers. Following that, they matched up the Symbolon videos with their RCIA schedule. Only then did they roll it out to the RCIA catechists/helpers. They ran through a few sample sessions and then each volunteer prepared for their particular session using the Symbolon videos and leader's guide .

Bobby shared that the first presentation where they used Symbolon ran into a “speed bump”. The presenter tried to “make it his own” and deviated from the Symbolon leader's guide format. Bobby said this taught them all the importance of following the “script”; he said that he's found that Dr. Sri has done a great job in preparing for the best outcomes and that best results happen when they follow the program as it's meant to be. Bobby's efforts for RCIA consisted in communicating and reassuring the RCIA

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team. He made sure everything needed was available for the team and let them know that everything would work out as they were incorporating this new format.

Bobby said that from his perspective, Formed programs leave room for the Holy Spirit. He said that the format of video and reflection and discussion really reaches into people’s hearts. He said that the former presentation-style format was lacking something that stirred the listener. Now he finds that the learning is active, not passive. He reiterated his advice: “Stick to the script, follow the program.” He said that every time they strayed from the way it was designed to be viewed, they lost the entire group and confusion reigned.

Although they won’t completely know the results for RCIA until the spring, Bobby said that they did just finish the first PreCana class using Beloved. The feedback was better than Bobby imagined. He shared his favorite quote from one of the pre-Cana couples: “I came in completely closed off on this whole thing. One more ‘Catholic requirement’ before I can get married. I can’t believe how completely different I feel about my relationship to God, and how excited I am to have Him helping us in our marriage. I feel like I finally get it.”

Overall, Bobby said that using FORMED is helping parish leaders to be facilitators. It is also bringing consistency as before the message could be different based on who was presenting.

Parish: St. Stanislaus

Presenter: Tony Bellitto

Topic: Using FORMED to reach parents

Tony shared that the PREP program at St. Stanislaus requires parents to stay while their child attends the PREP class. While they wait for their child, they show the parents a YDisciple video and then facilitate a discussion.

They also have been using Reborn for their PreJordan preparation. Parents view 2 of the 5 videos before the general meeting. At the meeting, which is 90 minutes long, they show additional video clips to “whet their appetite”. They then encourage the parents & godparents to watch the remaining three videos. If parents miss the meeting, the Baptism is postponed. Child care is provided for couples if needed. Tony said that the videos total only 3.5 hours...the typical time of a baseball game.

They have also been hosting a movie night on Friday nights, which has been popular. They recently showed the St. Teresa of Calcutta movie with popcorn. During Advent, they plan to show various episodes from the “Footprints of God” series – David, Mary, & Jesus. They use bulletin inserts to promote FORMED to the overall parish. (See attached.)