

JBL CASE STUDY FOR ADAPTATION OF THE CATECHUMENAL PROCESS

IN: *Presbyterian, suburban St. Louis, Average Sunday attendance 245.*

Background

1. What four characteristics best describe your church community, especially what makes you unique?

Primarily a white middle class congregation with less than 2% minority representation. We have an active youth Sunday School Program and Adult Sunday School Program, in addition to a number of Bible Study groups. We have actively participated in OASIS Food Pantry and have several members who are a part of the Community Warming Center during the winter with other congregations in the area. There are a number of other outreach opportunities that members of our congregation are a part of. And recently we have instituted a Silent Vigil every Saturday morning outside our church in support of Social Justice, as well as a Food Pantry Box on our property that provides non-perishable food and other items free to those in need in our community. It is stocked daily and items for this are donated by members of the congregation.

2. What is the biggest challenge facing your community?

Like most communities, dealing with the pandemic is our biggest challenge. How do we stay connected, how do we assure that people in our community have food and resources?

Pattern of the catechumenal process

3. How does an inquirer connect with your community? How is initial contact made?

Typically we start to announce our new JOURNEY session in early July. From that time to until the start of THE JOURNEY, our Pastor and JOURNEY leadership will reach out to new guests of the church to talk about New Hope and provide opportunities to ask questions to gauge their interest in joining our congregation.

4. How do you figure out what their background is? And what they are seeking?

Again, the outreach and personal conversations we have with our guests helps us to determine their background and what they are seeking. We typically have an equal share of those reaffirming their baptism with those seeking to be baptized for the first time.

5. How do they get to know other inquirers? When do you have gatherings with them?

Their first opportunity to meet other inquirers occurs when we start THE JOURNEY.



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6. What is a typical format for a gathering?? How long does it usually last?

When we first started THE JOURNEY we met after church every Sunday starting in January through Pentecost. But over time we recognized that there was a real need to provide time for between gatherings for meditation and an opportunity to reflect. So we began to put time between our gatherings and extended our overall session time and have found our conversations when we gather to be deeper and more intent.

7. Who serve as their catechists and mentors through the process? Lay people? Clergy?

Though our Pastor is involved, he felt that it was important that this was a process that was supported by members of the congregation. We have lunch prior to the start of each gathering where he often joins us and will use this time to answer questions that inquires have. But when we break out to our gathers, these are run by lay people.

8. When do you provide them with sponsors as companions and support?

Prior to the Rite of Welcome. We are very intentional with this process. We are fortunate to have many members of our congregation who have been through THE JOURNEY so that allows us the opportunity to help match the companion with the inquirer.

Stages of the growth in the catechumenal process

9. When are they ready to be recognized by the congregation as seekers/hearers/catechumens?

We introduce the inquirers and their companions to the congregation during the first rite, and during the celebration of each rite after that. We felt it was important that the congregation knew that though they may not be actively involved with THE JOURNEY, they are still instrumental in this process and that their prayers and support of each inquirer and companion is vital to the growth of our spiritual community.

10. How do your gatherings help them to encounter the Word of God, especially as it is found in the lectionary?

Most of our study is done around the lectionary of that Sunday's service. Lectio focuses on one of the passages of Sunday.

11. What additional topics from Christian tradition and practice do you try to share with them in your gatherings?

We have discussions around questions that are presented, often talk about what is happening in the world and our role in the church universal.



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12. When are they ready to be recognized by the congregation as candidates for Baptism? How do your gatherings use the Word to open their minds and hearts to a deeper sense both of repentance and of Jesus's love?

In preparation for reaffirmation or baptism, we spend a great deal of time talking about what this means, using Gospel and discussion. We spend time talking about their journey to this point, emphasizing that our growth with God is an ever changing and growing process. And that during this process it is an opportunity to recognize this and use this as an opportunity to celebrate your connection/reconnection with Him. This is a celebration that is part of our Easter Vigil.

13. How does the period of intense preparation prepare them to make the Baptismal Covenant/Promises?

See above

14. How have you best managed to involve the participants in the life of your community, especially in service to the world?

We don't have to manage that. By nature of the process those who have been through THE JOURNEY have found their calling as disciples of Christ. Many have gone on to be a part of various outreach programs that we offer, have gone on to teach Sunday School, to serve on the Session or to become a Deacon, and most have come back to serve as companions for other inquirers.

15. How have the various rituals of the catechumenate affected your participants?

We often hear from the inquires after each celebration how that has helped them be more connected and supported by our congregation. And the emotional stories they share of how each has personally effected them is both inspiring and a true testament of the Holy Spirit's presence.

16. How have the various rituals of the catechumenate affected the congregation?

At first it was very new. As Presbyterians we do not practice laying on hands other than previous Session members do that during the installation of new Session members. But over time our congregation has realized the importance that this provides, not only for our inquirers but for our congregation as a whole. THE JOURNEY has been transformational for our congregation. Even for those who have not been through THE JOURNEY. There is a sense that we are much larger than our church but a part of the church universal. It has been exciting to see this transformation.



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Advice

17. What is the most important bit of advice that you have for another practitioner in your situation?

To always, always remember that this is a very personal process for both the inquirer and the companion and that it is important to remember that each person who participates can be at a different place in their journey. It is important to meet people where they are and be adaptable with how you approach the Catechumenate to meet the dynamics each "class" while staying true to the foundation of this process. I would also say to be prepared for the potential transformation that this could have on your congregation.

