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Religious Education 101

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"In the spring of 2004, I began interviewing for positions as a Director/Coordinator of Faith Formation for several parishes in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester. To my luck, beginning in June of 2004, I was hired to the pastoral staff of the Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford, New York."



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In the spring of 2004, I began interviewing for positions as a Director/Coordinator of Faith Formation for several parishes in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester. To my luck, beginning in June of 2004, I was hired to the pastoral staff of the Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford, New York.

The purpose of this reflection is to enlighten those who read this about the benefits of working for a faith community, and also the struggles one might face along the way. I must admit that when I began my current position as Associate Director of Faith Formation, I did not know exactly what I was in for. According to my job description, my duties included overseeing the Children's Faith Formation program for grades kindergarten through eighth as well as overseeing sacramental preparation for the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Confirmation. I would soon learn that there was much, much more to my "job" than this.

To be frank, choosing a career path in Faith Formation is not my overall goal in life. I hope someday, whenever that may be, to become a university professor of theology or ethics, or something along those lines. Nearing the completion of my Master's degree in theology from the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, Ontario, I realized that at my young age (I was 23) I did not want to be the only 23 year old entering into a Ph.D. program where 90% of the other students would be perhaps twice my age. I did apply to a few programs however, with lukewarm luck (I was rejected.) So, push came to shove, and it was time to go to work.

The best thing about working for a parish is the people. Everyone is welcoming. I must admit it was a little overwhelming at times, trying to learn everyone's names, shaking hands, and meeting all these new people—especially in a parish with 1,600 families. The people of the church however, have a quality that you would not find working in a different setting, in a major corporation for example. There is a genuine appreciation for you doing what you do, and a genuine welcome and hope that you can fulfill the faith education needs of their children. It's a good feeling: knowing that you have everybody behind you in what you are trying to accomplish. You have the freedom to try new things, get parents involved, open new lines of communication, and really explore you who are in relation to God while at the same time trying to steer 1,000 children in the same direction. In a sense, you are accountable to God, not your manager or supervisor, or "boss." I do have an immediate supervisor—our Director of Faith Formation—but our working relationship is far from the corporate model. We actually complement one another in a unique way and offer one another different aspects on what we're trying to accomplish in our work. She technically is my "boss", along with our pastor, but our staff is really a team: and I mean that in the most basic sense—we all work together.

There are, to some extent, certain struggles that accompany a career of this type. One is funding. I am lucky enough to be at a parish whose members are financially committed to helping their church the best they can. Other persons who do what I do are not as fortunate as our program is—they struggle with enough funding for supplies, books, and activities. Also, responding to parents in certain situations can get complicated. For example, when preparing nearly 100 children for a sacrament, you can only answer so many questions and return so many phone calls at once.

Also, there is always a struggle between those Catholics that come to Mass, and those who do not. Sacramental preparation in the Diocese of Rochester is home-based. This means that parents are the primary educators of their children who are preparing for a more full communion in the church. How can these people adequately prepare their children when they do not participate at church in any way, shape, or form? It is easy to see that struggles accompany working in ministry, just like any other career choice.

Will I work in ministry for the rest of my life? I think so. Ministry to me is being Catholic. Any job I have I will be a minister in some sense, even if I choose a career that has nothing to do with church. I am a Catholic Christian, and that carries big responsibility. Whether I am a religious educator or an airline pilot, my faith affects my work and in turn, I affect the people around me.

By: Jonathan Schott

Class of 2002