



Article - Vision Statement #7:

"We are now and will grow as a regional Catholic center, offering opportunities to other families and parishes."

The guest writer for this week's article is Judy Maten, director of Religious Education.

What do you think of when you hear the word 'church?' Do you think of a structure or do you think of the people that make up the faith community, one in the Body of Christ? We are blessed with a beautiful worship space, but it is the people that make up our faith community and as a faith community we have become a center for Religious Formation not just in our Vicariate, but also throughout the Archdiocese. As the Master Plan states, we are now and will grow as a regional Catholic center, offering opportunities to other families and parishes. Shrine stands as a beacon of faith, education, service and outreach to those throughout the community.

We are the largest parish in the Archdiocese of Detroit. To give you an idea of the magnitude of our Religious Formation programs, 180 children received their First Reconciliation and First Communion last year. Over 105 students will receive the sacrament of Confirmation this fall. Our RCIA program is also the largest in the Archdiocese. Churches throughout the Archdiocese have contacted the Shrine Religious Formation Office for assistance in developing sacramental preparation programs for children and adolescent Youth Ministry. There is no doubt that we are doing something right at Shrine.

The goal of any Religious Formation program is to lead people to a mature faith. This holds true for children and especially adults. Four basic components build the foundation of any formation program and include worship, education, fellowship or community building, and service. Religious Formation is more than sitting in a classroom learning from a catechism book. It is active ministry, inviting those on the faith journey to spread the "good news" and giving them the tools to be able to do so.

Just as advances in education have changed the way we teach our children in the academic classroom, the Magisterium has composed documents outlining instructional models for handing on the faith to our children, youth and adults. These catechetical models involve hands-on activities, prayer services, and small and large group experiences to drive home lessons. Central to the handing on of the faith is the family. Newer models of Catholic formation include family-centered programs. Strong adolescent and teen Youth Ministry programs include opportunities designed to allow adults to minister to them and allow youth to minister to each other. To be effective, all of these models need large gathering rooms that seat 200-300 people and breakout rooms for small group activities. Gyms and classrooms do not meet these needs. Currently, we must rent the Royal Oak Senior Center for First Communion and Reconciliation retreats; Confirmation retreats are held off-site, as well, because our facilities cannot handle the numbers that we have enrolled in our programs. Anyone that attended last year's very successful Easter Egg Hunt (which over 250 people attended) or the Vacation Bible School this past summer can attest to how quickly the facilities became too crowded. These programs are an integral part of a vibrant faith community.

As a Catholic regional center for education, we host speakers and formation opportunities for every age group. Each year, Shrine hosts Catechist Formation events that are open to those who teach the faith throughout the Archdiocese. Last year, 1,000 teens filled the church to hear Jason Evert's message on chastity. This year, we are hosting a three part speaker series focusing on

instilling moral values in our children, featuring Fr. Gerardi, nationally known speaker Dr. Ray Guarendi and Dr. Daniel Dentino from Ave Maria College. During the 2003 Lenten season, Fr. Fred Brinkman, head of the Holy Shroud Guild, will lecture on the Shroud of Turin. Because of crowds expected, these events will be held in the church, which is not the proper venue for this type of activity. We also must have the technology in our facilities to handle multi-media presentations that are so much a part of our way of life.

Looking to the future, there is a need to develop a regional Religious Formation program for those with learning disabilities and special needs. Currently, each parish in the Vicariate serves the needs of its own members, using inclusion models of education. Depending on the disability, this is not a practical method, nor does it best meet the needs of these adults or children. Ministering to those with special needs is a crucial part of our outreach as a Catholic community. Shrine has the talent and expertise to develop such a program, but is restricted in doing so due to building accessibility.

Looking towards the future, we must be able to meet the needs of our parish community, using current models for catechesis and formation. We are also a regional center for Catholic Formation. To be a leader, we must have the tools to continue the ministry Christ has called us to, including facilities that can accommodate the numbers and types of activities that will spread His Word to all corners!