

November 12, 2011

From Father Baer

Announcement Regarding Faith Formation Staffing and Confirmation Program

A. FAITH FORMATION STAFFING:

1. Introduction:

- a. Our Parish has faced significant financial difficulties over the past decade, including a sizable debt and budget shortfalls in our annual operating expenses. This past year, I needed to make difficult decisions to reduce our School Staff and our Pastoral Ministry Staff. Despite an encouraging upturn in pledged giving this Fall, we still foresee a budget shortfall of \$90,000 for the current fiscal year (July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012). We cannot spend money that we do not have.
 - b. In light of our strained financial condition, I have decided to reduce our Faith Formation Staff, in order to save approximately \$70,000 per year. I do so with reluctance, because of the importance of our Faith Formation efforts. However, I believe that, supported by dedicated and well-trained volunteers, the reduced staffing will be more than capable of serving the current scope of our Faith Formation programs.
- 2. Director of Faith Formation:** It is with sincere regret that I announce the elimination of the Position of Director of Faith Formation, which has been held by Mr. Christopher Magee since 2009. Chris has done well in his leadership of various Adult Faith Formation programs, including the RCIA process, Bible Studies, and other opportunities for continued spiritual growth. Chris also served as Supervisor for the Director of Faith Formation for Confirmation and Youth Ministry and the Director of Children's Ministry. I will take leadership for most of these Adult Faith Formation programs in the weeks ahead, and I will meet with the leaders and volunteers of these programs in the next few days to develop a plan for continuity as we move forward. We pray God's blessing upon Chris and his family as he enters the next chapter of his life and ministry.
- 3. Director of Youth Ministry (formerly Director of Faith Formation for Confirmation and Youth Ministry):** This position will be reduced from 40 hours per week to 25 hours per week. See below for related changes in Transfiguration's Confirmation Program. I will now serve as direct Supervisor for this position.
- 4. Director of Children's Ministry:** This position will be reduced from 30 hours per week to 25 hours per week. Again, I will now serve as direct Supervisor for this position.

B. CONFIRMATION PROGRAM:

1. I wish to announce a change in the Confirmation Program at Transfiguration Parish: **We will begin to confirm our School Students and our Faith Formation Students at the conclusion of 8th Grade.**
2. Specifically, the following will occur for our current 10th Graders, 9th Graders, 8th Graders, and 7th Graders:
 - a. **Current 10th Graders (“Level 2” Students in Faith Formation for Confirmation):**
No changes. They will complete their remaining preparation for Confirmation over the next six months as scheduled, and will be confirmed at the Cathedral on Thursday, May 10, as scheduled.
 - b. **Current 9th Graders (“Level 1” Students in Faith Formation for Confirmation):**
Their remaining preparation for Confirmation will be condensed from 18 months to 6 months, and they will be confirmed at the Cathedral early this Fall, at a date to be determined in the next few weeks. (The Archdiocese is not able to add any additional Students to the Confirmations already scheduled at the Cathedral of St. Paul and the Basilica of St. Mary this Spring, but they have agreed to schedule our current 9th Graders for Confirmation at the Cathedral sometime in September or October.)
 - Our current 9th Graders in “Level 1” will complete all of their required preparations for Confirmation this Spring during the sessions currently scheduled on Sunday evenings, and without additional scheduling commitments, but with two exceptions: They will be required to participate in one after-school service opportunity this Spring or Summer, and they will be required to attend one 3-hour preparatory mini-Retreat at Transfiguration this Fall, approximately two weeks before their Confirmation. For the sake of convenience, we will offer two times for this 3-hour mini-Retreat: one on a Saturday afternoon, the other on a Sunday afternoon.
 - c. **Current 8th Graders:** There are two groups of 8th Graders: those enrolled in our School, and those enrolled in our Faith Formation Program. Both groups of 8th Graders will be confirmed together at the Cathedral early next Fall, at a time to be determined in the next few weeks.
 - **Current School 8th Graders:** Beginning immediately, we will devote part of 8th-Grade Religion class time to Confirmation Preparation. I am already teaching each of the two sections of 8th Grade on a weekly basis, and I will devote most of my class time to Confirmation Preparation. I will be working in cooperation with our School Principal, Ms. Jan Heuman, our Middle-School Religion Teacher, Mrs. Julie Bachmeier, and our Youth Director. We will incorporate one after-school service opportunity and one daylong Retreat during a school day into their Confirmation preparation during the upcoming Spring semester. They will also be required to participate in a 3-hour preparatory mini-Retreat at Transfiguration next Fall. They will do this with

Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon options, similar to that described above for the current 9th Graders (“Level 1”).

- **Current Faith Formation 8th Graders:** Beginning in January, 8th-Grade Faith Formation will be devoted to Confirmation Preparation. 8th Graders will continue to meet on Wednesday evenings, with no additional Wednesday commitments, but with an after-school service opportunity scheduled for Spring Semester, and a preparatory mini-Retreat scheduled next Fall, on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday afternoon, before their Confirmation. I will be working in cooperation with the Youth Director, the Catechists, and the Parents, in order to make all necessary preparations and secure all needed resources for this transition.
- d. **Current 7th Graders:** The 7th Graders in both our School and our Faith Formation Program will begin this January to devote some of their class-time to the early stages of Confirmation Preparation. Both groups of 7th Graders will be Confirmed together at the Cathedral in the Spring of 2013, at a date to be determined in the latter part of their 8th-Grade Spring semester. Again, I will be working with our School Staff, our Youth Director, and our Faith Formation Catechists to make all necessary preparations and to secure all needed resources.

3. Why these Changes?

- a. There are many and varying opinions about the best age for Confirmation. These differences reflect the many and varying viewpoints about the Sacrament of Confirmation itself. Is it a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood? If so, what kind of adulthood? Spiritual? Psychological? Social? Some have argued that today’s young people don’t step into mature adulthood until their 20’s! Others argue that it’s best to equip our youth earlier with the graces of the Sacrament, before they step into the challenges of high school life.
- b. The Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis has officially stated in a recent document that the Sacrament of Confirmation may be celebrated in 8th Grade, 9th Grade, 10th Grade, or 11th Grade, with individual exceptions for other ages made by special permission from the Archdiocese on the basis of serious health issues or other extraordinary circumstances. In the past there may have been directives circulating around the Archdiocese and Parishes indicating a preference for 10th grade or, at least, discouraging Confirmation in 8th Grade, but the present position of the Archdiocese is neutral about which of the four grades -- 8th, 9th, 10th, or 11th -- is preferable.
- c. In my first assignment (1996-1999) as a Priest, at Nativity of our Lord Parish in Saint Paul, we confirmed our students in 8th Grade. I saw many benefits in their receiving the preparation and graces of the Sacrament at that time of transition from grade school to high school.
- d. Last Spring, Bryan Collins and I interviewed most of the 2011 Confirmands and their parents. One of the questions we asked concerned the age of Confirmation. A majority favored Confirmation in 10th grade, with a minority

favoring 8th grade or 9th grade. This Fall, I sent out a survey to parents of children and youth in our Faith Formation programs. I received a mix of responses concerning the preferred age for Confirmation.

- e. My chief reason for making the switch to 8th Grade might be surprising. That is, I am doing it in order to strengthen our Youth Ministry among our 9th-12th Graders. I wish to see a more dynamic, apostolic, ministry-oriented, leadership-fostering approach to Youth Ministry for 9th-12 Graders, and I believe that it needs to be voluntary, not mandatory, in order to foster such a spirit. I have been involved in high school and college ministry for many years, and I think that it is better to separate the earlier, required, classroom-oriented preparations before Confirmation from the latter, voluntary, action-oriented follow-through after Confirmation. Frankly, going to a classroom at night is boring for most high school students. We have only begun to explore creative options for keeping our high-school students excited and engaged in the mission of Jesus Christ and His Church.

4. **For Parents Wishing to Learn More about These Changes:** I am scheduling two opportunities in the next week for Parents who wish to learn more about these changes regarding our Confirmation Program:
 - a. Tuesday, November 15, 3:00-3:15 p.m., in the School Cafeteria. This session is especially timed for the convenience of Middle-School Parents and other Parents who are picking up their children at the end of the School day, but Parents of Faith Formation children are also welcome to attend.
 - b. Sunday, November 20, 7:00 p.m., in the Church. This session is scheduled at the conclusion of 6:00 p.m. Mass on Sunday evening, and is open to Parents of both School Children and Faith Formation Children. (The Catechists, Volunteers, and Youth are also welcome to attend.)
5. **For Teachers, Catechists and Other Volunteers Affected by These Changes:** I will be contacting you in the next few days to schedule meetings in which we will prepare for upcoming changes and transitions.

Christ Jesus Our Lord, Shine in Us!
Christ Jesus Our Lord, Shine through Us!