

REPORT FROM THE EMMAUS CENTRE TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY – AUGUST 2020

175th Anniversary Celebrations

All throughout the Summer of 2019, the Emmaus Centre was deeply involved in the preparations for our Diocese's 175th Anniversary Celebrations which were held from September 14-16, 2019. As a member of the planning committee, I obtained a quote for the construction of the Artisan Stand which was used in the Closing Mass, worked with Sandra O'Connell on the production of the 175th Anniversary Quilt, worked with Jennifer Hatt on the "Take the Bus" initiative and with Fr. Conrad Edwards on the program for the Closing Mass.

I took the lead on our 175th Anniversary Celebrations Catechetical Day, held on September 15 at St. Joseph Parish Hall, Port Hawkesbury. Anne Jamieson, Director of Catechesis – Diocese of Hamilton, gave her second presentation of the weekend on the theme, *Echoing the Good News: A Deepening Love and Clearer Witness*. Her presentation was very well received, with many catechists contacting me asking to have her speak again in our Diocese.

On September 4, 2019, I had the opportunity to attend and Alpha Training Session at Our Lady of Fatima Parish Hall. Not having any working knowledge of the Alpha Program previously; I found the session very helpful.

Catechist and Coordinators Workshop

On Saturday October 19, the Emmaus Centre hosted a workshop for catechists and coordinators facilitated by Charlene Peters, Catechetical Director- Diocese of Charlottetown. The theme of her presentation was *Our Call as Catechists: A Day of Reflection and Visioning*. Many challenges and concerns were raised by our catechists and coordinators which will require further conversations. And in light of our current situation, where we are called to provide our ministry in a time of pandemic, we need to revisit how we carry out catechesis within the diocese.

Catechetical Sunday 2019

With the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress announced for June 12-14, 2020, the resources distributed for Catechetical Sunday reflected the theme: *The Source and Summit of our Faith – The Eucharist*. Articles by Richard Rohr and Fr. James Hanvey, SJ and videos by Bishop Robert Barron, Ron Rolheiser and Fr. John Baldovin were circulated to our catechists and coordinators.

Also in October 2019, I attended the Atlantic Catechetical Association Annual General Meeting hosted by the Archdiocese of Halifax – Yarmouth.

Transformed by Eucharist, Diocesan Eucharistic Congress

The Emmaus Centre offered assistance with the planning of the second large Diocesan event of the year, the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress. As a member of the planning committee, I was involved with several administrative aspects of the Congress as well as creating a First Eucharist Package for children preparing for First Communion and their families. The package consisted of: a prayer card for children, a prayer of parents, a little book of prayers for children and for catechists, a guided meditation on the Eucharist for children and their families which they could lead. I would like to thank Fr. Conrad Edwards for his insight and inspiration in the preparation of these resources. The package was circulated to our priests and coordinators in February 2020. As we know the Congress was postponed due to the pandemic.

Adult Faith Formation Research Project – Saint Paul University, Ottawa

In December 2019, I was invited to be a member the Phase Two Focus Group of an Adult Faith Formation Research Project. Our focus group consists of members from across the country. To begin the process, I was asked to bring together several people involved in Adult Faith Ministry within our Diocese to discuss a document entitled, *The Five Promising Practices and other Practical Wisdom: A Resource for All Who Accompany Adult Faith*. This document was created in Phase One of the research. There were mixed reactions to the document: some finding in it a useful and much needed approach to Adult Faith Formation, others found the language challenging and did not have the time to engage with “another program” for Adult Faith Formation.

I recorded the comments from our discussions and presented them to the focus group when we met in at Saint Paul University in February 2020. With the advent of the pandemic, the remainder of the research project moved online and will be completed in September 2020.

Meeting with Bishop Kirkpatrick

In February 2020, I met with Bishop Kirkpatrick and presented him with an information package on the work of the Emmaus Centre within the Diocese. We chatted about how we are delivering catechesis within the Diocese and the challenges we face with the declining number of children attending faith formation sessions, declining number of catechists and parental disconnect with their own faith life and that of their children. We planned a Catechist Appreciation Day in May 2020, where Bishop Kirkpatrick could meeting with our catechists and coordinators and discuss their issues. With the pandemic that gathering was postponed.

Meeting with Catechists in Mabou

In March 2020, I was invited to meet with catechists in Mabou to discuss their ministry. I provided information on *Finding God*, our catechetical program and we discussed at length the Intergenerational Model of Catechesis. A model which works more effectively with small numbers of children attending than does the standard classroom format. It also engages parents in the faith formation of their children.

Growth of Emmaus Book Store

In August 2019, with shared funding originating from the Office of Youth Ministry, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish and the Emmaus Centre, our Book Store was able to establish a second location in the Sr. Catherine Steele Centre in Stellarton to serve our customers in the Pictou and Antigonish/Guysborough deaneries. This location carries many of the religious items, gifts and books available at our Membertou Book Store.

It is managed by Kevin Henderson.

The Book Store has also moved online, with the creation of our Pop Up Sales Shop on our Diocesan website. The Pop Up Sales Shop will highlight theme specific gifts, books and religious items which can be purchased on line and picked up at our Membertou or Stellarton locations.

The Emmaus Book Store was also able to provide French resources free of charge to our Acadian parishes. These resources became available during an inventory review carried out by staff. I would like to recognize the work carried out by Irene MacNeil and Nick Vince, our Book Store staff over this past year. Their hard work and collaboration has made the growth of the Book Store possible.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit Resource

During the Summer, David Rankin, our seminarian, has been working at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre. The Emmaus Centre asked him to create an online resource explaining the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. He did an exceptional job and the resource will be made available to pastors, coordinators and catechists shortly. It will also be posted on our Diocesan Web Site.

PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES CARRIED OUT WHEN THE EMMAUS CENTRE WAS CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC

- Although children's catechesis within the Diocese came to an abrupt end in March, I continued to source and share resources to support and uplift our catechists and coordinators during this pandemic time.
- In early April, catechists and coordinators were invited to participate in a Zoom session to pray, share our experiences and support each other as we made our way forward in those uncertain times. From this session a Support and Share Group was formed and we met every Monday up until the end of June. I hope we can reconvene our gathering in the Fall. This group was extremely helpful for me, as we shared resources, discussed parish and pastoral issues, voiced our frustrations, fears and hopes and offered each other affirmation and support.
- I researched ways of placing our catechetical program, *Finding God*, online. I entered into discussions with Monica Padera from Loyola Press and obtained copyright permission to place the content and additional resources found in *Finding God* online. I also contacted Kevin Henderson, a representative of Velsoft, a company located in New Glasgow which provides a platform for online learning. I gathered a team of Faith Formation Coordinators from throughout the Diocese who will receive training as course writers with the training beginning on August 11. They will be responsible for transferring the *Finding God* content into online courses and we hope to be able to provide these online courses of *Finding God* by October 2020. The Emmaus Centre has purchased a subscription to use this platform and it is available to any Diocesan Office or Ministry who would wish to provide online learning opportunities.
- I contacted members of the Atlantic Catechetical Association and the National Office of Evangelization and Catechesis to get a sense as to what other Dioceses were doing to provide catechetical programs in this pandemic time.
- I provided direction to the Emmaus Centre staff as they verified the sales floor inventory and I created an online sales form for items the Emmaus Book Store will be selling in their new online sales shop on the Diocesan Website.
- I created an online form to collect donations to our parishes and Mass for Shut Ins. I compile and receipt the donations received weekly and submit them to Cathy Farrow.
- I collaborated with Cathy Farrow to prepare a series of protocols for reopening the Diocesan Pastoral Centre. Researching and purchasing the items needed to reopen.
- I continue my participation in a research project on Adult Faith Formation with Saint Paul University via Zoom.

I was grateful that I only had to work from home occasionally. I live alone and valued the company of my coworkers during the time of lockdown. I feel safe in the work environment we have created and the protocols that are in place for the protection of our customers and staff.

Submitted by Debbie Aker
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