

FAITH CONNECT @ CHRIST THE KING

— AN INTRODUCTION —

Faith Connect is a new concept designed specifically for the parishioners of the Cathedral of Christ the King. Its purpose is to provide our members with personal contact concerning parish life, and to enliven the interaction among us both socially and spiritually. The name Faith Connect was chosen for its fresh sound and spirit of action which identifies precisely what it is – a network to connect those of faith. Faith Connect provides an overarching framework and hub from which the various functions of the parish can be coordinated. It will initially focus on three important issues that are difficult to manage in a parish as large as Christ the King.

The first issue is communication. Through Faith Connect, a reworked and easy- to-navigate Web site is being developed that will become a central deposit of information about all aspects of parish involvement. Parishioners will be encouraged to visit the site frequently, expanding the limited amount of information that can be feasibly included in the weekly bulletin received at Mass.

The second issue is the inactive parishioner. There are many reasons why a parishioner might not participate actively in the life of the parish, and we want to find out personally how we can better meet their needs as a parish, and ultimately, how they can add vitality to Christ the King. With Faith Connect, a contact person will be available for each parish family unit to give and receive information pertinent to Parish life and to relay specific questions and needs of the family to the proper person at the Parish level. New parishioners will be welcomed into their neighborhoods with the same personal attention soon after they register.

The third issue is that of Catholic Christian community in the neighborhoods. In our busy and varied lifestyles, many of us are involved in several environmental settings on a regular basis. These might include our work environment, civic organizations, social groups, and sports leagues, among others, but these environments are seldom openly Christian. Even some families do not freely share their faith with one another. A Christian must have an environment in his life in which Christianity is openly accepted, talked about, and lived daily, if he is going to lead a really vital Christian life. It is very hard to live an openly Christian life without it. More and more Catholics are searching for such an environment in their lives. God uses community in forming us into the Image of His Son, and Faith Connect will help to facilitate this formation.

One might say that active parish involvement creates Christian community, but often much of what goes on in the parish setting is goal, task, or service oriented, or it is a temporary situation in which we do feel the spiritual bond, but do not really have the time or circumstance to enter each other's lives. Even so, the very active Catholic probably is indeed spiritually connected to other Catholics, yet far more of our parishioners lack that day-to-day environment of Catholics supporting each other in living a Christian life.

The vision of Faith Connect is to encourage the establishment of Neighborhood Catholic Communities all over Lexington. We see a community forming under the guidance of its contact person in groups of 8-12 families who live in neighboring homes. We realize that development will be somewhat uneven at first. We cannot force communities to form nor dictate exactly how they will form, but through the ongoing personal contact to every family, we hope to promote the spirit of "Body of Christ." Even those who choose not to participate in a neighborhood community will be connected to the parish by this personal communication. We must trust the Holy Spirit to draw us together.

What are the essential elements of a Neighborhood Catholic Community? They are: Sharing, Learning, Mutual Support, Prayer, and Mission. We will seek to ensure that these elements will always be present in our Communities. In other respects, these Communities will have different personalities just as the members do. After establishing initial communication with the families, the leader will plan an informal gathering for socializing and discussion about what the group might envision as a spiritual support system for themselves. It should flow somewhat naturally from their common bond as Catholics and geographic neighbors. Therefore, we think that the groups will choose various forms of expressing faith from very simple to very structured, depending on the group dynamic. *Faith Connect* is not a rigid or complicated program. Its goal is to create relationships that will empower us to be stronger and more committed Christians! As the families learn more about each other, they could (for example) want to help each other in times of need, acknowledge and celebrate achievements and milestones, and serve the Parish or community together as a group.

The leader will assist the group by presenting suggestions from resources supplied by a team of coordinators whose purpose will be to provide all the group leaders with ideas and support, and to relay information between the groups and the staff at Christ the King. Each coordinator will be responsible for serving a certain number of group leaders, and will meet with these leaders periodically to share ways to keep improving the objectives of *Faith Connect*.

The formation team will become the administrators. They will be in close communication with the priests and staff and will receive feedback from the groups through the coordinators or directly from the group leaders. It will be their responsibility to assist in replacing leaders as needed and to continue to make improvements to *Faith Connect* in all the areas mentioned above.

Small faith community concepts have become more numerous in the years since Vatican II. We believe our *Neighborhood Catholic Communities* will be unique among them in that they are formed right where we live. We wish for every family to feel included and we will continue to let them know it. However, because *Faith Connect* is a newly conceived approach we are forming several test groups late this summer to discover the best way to present Faith Connect to the parish at large. We plan the full establishment of *Faith Connect* in late spring or early fall of 2010. It is our fervent prayer that the parishioners of Christ the King will embrace *Faith Connect* and will not only help promote its concept, but will open their hearts and homes to each other – in Jesus' name.

Fr. Mark Dreves

and

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