

On Holy Ground

The fields are freshly plowed and rich clumps of soil create earth tone shades of a mosaic along the highway. Changing seasons always lead me to a sense of hope and wonder. I am returning from yet another catechetical meeting and the view beyond my windshield invites me to dream, imagine and play with thoughts and ideas. I invite you to meander with me into the catechetical world of my mind.

In November of 1999, the U.S. Catholic Bishops printed a pastoral plan for adult faith formation entitled, "Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us". The plan was written to catechetical leaders in parishes and dioceses in an effort to "...awaken throughout the Church in our country a passion for renewal in the ministry of adult faith formation" (24). In September of 2005, Bishop Michael Saltarelli wrote a Pastoral Letter to the people of the Diocese of Wilmington, "Go and Teach: Facing the Challenges of Catechesis Today." He told us, "Effective Adult Faith Formation is essential to our parishes. A parish cannot exist without a strong, complete, and systematic catechesis for all its members." We have yet to find the way to light the fires of faith and we continue to struggle to provide a rich and diverse catechesis for our adults.

Fresh from a meeting that offered insights, reflections and arguments on adult faith formation, my mind found the field in which to play. My wanderings always begin with a question and quickly I am full of questions with no intent to answer-only to enjoy the gift of wonder.

What are we really asking? How is one awakened to an adult faith life? What does an adult faith life look like? Do I know anyone who lives an adult faith life? What kind of a commitment would it be? How much time would be involved? What other things in life would have to be moved lower on the priority list? In the recesses of my mind, memories of textbooks, authors, theologians come to the forefront trying to articulate a definition for a real, true adult in faith. Jesus comes to mind and I quickly push the thought away.

There is a pause in my thoughts as I surround myself with the beauty of the day. Maybe, in my heart of hearts, I want to avoid what adult faith formation really means. The fields beyond my windshield have turned to marsh and a lone heron sits in the dwindling light. My thoughts continue as I drive through the late afternoon.

Why do I ignore the example of Jesus as a model of the adult faith life? Am I the only one who doesn't want to really know? Do we know what it means to live an adult faith and push it away? Are we avoiding the answers? Are we afraid?

Over the last few years, I have had a number of opportunities to discuss adult faith formation with other catechetical leaders. I realize that the dialogue always begins with "Oh" and a nervous chuckle. Why? Will fear keep us from growing in faith? Will fear keep us from living out our Baptismal call? Will fear keep us from sharing our life in faith with those near to us? Do we understand of what we are afraid?

I turn the corner near my home and my thoughts begin to wind down. As the parish Director of Religious Education I must begin with, "How?". How am I going to ignite the fire of faith in our adult parishioners? How do I begin? I turn into my driveway as the sun is setting. As I glance beyond the garage I notice the small tree in our backyard ablaze with light. The setting sun and the fall colored leaves have combined to create the illusion that the tree is afire. Wow! I sit in awe! Immediately I think of another burning bush from our faith stories, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place you stand is holy ground."