

Adult Formation:

'We never stop taking that first step'

By DAVE MYERS

Southwest Kansas Catholic

In the Catholic faith, we never stop taking that first step.

There is just so much to learn: Why do we celebrate Mass the way we do? What is God asking of us? What is the history of our faith ... of our Church? What is Catholic social justice, and how do we differentiate it from those who equate it with political bias? How can our faith inform us when it comes to relationships? To making life choices? To reacting to the headlines?

Coleen Stein is the Director of Adult Formation for the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City, which includes Pastoral Ministry Formation, Catechist Formation, and other programs that are presented through the Interactive Television Network.

But that's not all there is to adult formation in the diocese.

"For me," Stein said, "any time we gather adults together to pray or to learn about our faith, that is adult formation: the Rite of Election; Scripture Day; RCIA; Stewardship Day.

"Formation has to be in all aspects of your life. When I watch the news, it's my formation that allows me to say, 'I can make a difference.' It's all so intertwined. I can't pull it apart. I can't hear the news without my formation entering into it."

Methods of adult formation are varied. Most adult Catholics are taking part in some sort of adult formation, including the Mass.

"The Eucharist changes people," Stein said. "Liturgy is the one piece of adult formation that reaches the most adults. Formation is education. Education is power. You can't live your life faithfully if you're not formed as an adult."

VIBRANT MINISTRIES and ITV PROGRAMS

While funding from the Vibrant Ministries Appeal helps these varied adult formation activities in a multitude of ways, specific funding will be used to help Stein maintain what can be a complicated and sometimes pricey Interactive Television System — the system by which Pastoral Ministry Formation and Catechist Formation are taught.

Through this system, people can attend classes — even earning a bachelor's degree — at sites throughout the diocese. One speaker at one primary location can interact with all those at the other locations.

"There are nine sites strategically located throughout the Dodge City diocese, and there are eight sites strategically located throughout the Salina diocese," Stein said. "Two sites are located at Newman University in Wichita.

"The ITV format has proved to be the most effective way of building community with a large group in different locations. This format also works well for us; one instructor, one presentation, reaching many students over two large dioceses."

Everyone, she added, "should know why we as Catholics practice our faith in the way that we do. This allows them to really listen at Mass. Someone said that we should leave Mass as if being shot out of a cannon, ready to make change. Non-Catholics should be asking, 'Why are they like that? Why are they so intent on causing positive change?' We're Catholic! Every time we're formed in some way, we are that person making a difference.

"I'm a better parent because of my formation," she said. "We know forgiveness. We understand how Jesus forgave. My kids can do anything, and I forgive them.

"I can't say that about everyone," she added, laughing, "but that is my goal!"

The Dodge City and Salina dioceses collaborate with Newman University to form Church in Partnership. Through this partnership, people who already have a bachelor's degree can obtain a bachelor's degree in Pastoral Ministry Formation from Newman University without ever stepping foot on the Wichita campus.

If they do not have a bachelor's degree, they can earn a diocesan diploma.

"The Pastoral Ministry Formation Program equips participants with the skills to fulfill roles to which their gifts and the needs of the time challenge them."

Marlyne Peck, Director of Liturgy and Music at St. Mary Parish in Garden City, said, "To anyone contemplating participation of a study course through the Pastoral Ministry Formation Program, I can only say do it and don't just think about it. I have been involved in Catechesis, Music Liturgy, Pastoral Ministry, etc... for many years ,and all I can say is that I wish I would have taken the classes from the beginning of my Stewardship Ministry life. Whether it is your choice to take these courses for personal enrichment or a certificate, you can't go wrong.

"I was always busy with my kids' activities and didn't realize how the participation in Pastoral Ministry Formation classes would empower my ministries in the Stewardship Categories that I was involved with. Pastoral Ministry Formation Programs give you knowledge, encouragement, and a constant awareness of Spiritual Renewal. What a gift!"