

LOOKING FOR LIFE-LONG FAITH FORMATION COORDINATOR*

*(Imperfect people need not apply)

by Jim Smith

Alright, now that we've got your attention, perfection is not in the job description. But what are the elements needed for one to help carry forward the vision of life-long faith formation?

Faith. Deep faith. But not a faith that makes you afraid to wrestle with angels. You're serving people who live often in shades of gray. If you're always black and white, you will only appeal to the most insecure. The rest will discount you as out of touch with real people, real lives, real world. So is it possible to manifest deep faith while holding in tension tough questions, true struggles? Absolutely. Holding both in tension can help make you accessible, compassionate, pastoral.

Back to faith. Are you hungry to trust, to surrender ego and hard edges of the heart to a God of profound love? Do you thirst for joy? You're in. Can you feel your blood warm to the thought of dying and rising, to the thought of heaven meeting earth in word made flesh, to the cultivation of human dignity? You're in. A genuine investment with the mysteries of faith you are called to teach and translate is essential. Have faith, too, in the solid church directives that wholeheartedly encourage life-long formation.

Imagination. The task of engaging kids and adults in their faith life can be like convincing someone to walk on hot coals. OK, its not that bad, but the work of inspiration is a challenge these days. To succeed is to shoot high. To imagine a community in which people of all ages are indeed hungry to learn and to journey in faith. And then to imagine a sky-full of ideas to gather people and ignite their hearts. Some old ways may not work, some new ways may not either. The trick is to imagine, to risk, to try, and to try again. And if imagination isn't your great gift, surround yourself with people who have it!

Patience. Not everyone is going to ride this train of life-long formation with eager energy. It will take time--to invite, to persuade, to inspire. And not all good ideas in life-long formation should be attempted in one great swoop. Start simply, gradually. Build, carefully. Besides, you need a life outside of church. The world will be a better place if you find it.

Collaborative disposition. You try to do all this alone and it'll kill you. A sustained vision of life-long formation is a true gift in any parish, but "sustained" implies a hill of hearts offering the gift. Pastor, staff, lay leadership are all crucial to the privilege. Let them in! Keep them engaged. Utilize their gifts in creative ways.

And don't stop there. When you invite lay catechists to hold the floor with you, marvelous things can happen to the energy in the entire community. When people see their neighbor, spouse, parent, co-worker, fellow pew sitter offering leadership as catechist, people sit up and ask "If they're so invested, why not me?"

While you're at it, make sure you're not the only one inviting people to the table of faith. Invitation is the privilege of everyone. Help create a groundswell of interest in this simple but essential role in evangelization and conversion. Whether the janitor, the receptionist, the pastor, the average parishioner—everyone needs to know the privilege of invitation is theirs to accomplish.

Love of God's people. Goes without saying. Trouble is, there are folks in pastoral ministry who see their people as incoherent, bleating sheep. You must be able to recognize the deep well of experience and lived wisdom that people bring to the table of faith. They may not be able to translate such experience to the mysteries they're called to profess, but that's where you come in. The bottom line is, they most likely *live* those mysteries. You don't give them what they don't have. You help them wrap faith and understanding around what is already there. And often, the people we serve, adults *and* kids, form us!

The Holy Spirit can't help but be a source and agent in these charisms of a life-long formation coordinator. May we pray, persistently, for the gift of the Holy Spirit to infuse our ministry.