

# Case Study

## La Petite Program at St. Anthony on the Lake Pewaukee, WI

### A Big Problem

Kathie Amidei, the Pastoral Associate for Lifelong Faith Formation, had a problem in 2005. Her intergenerational faith formation program was getting too big. There wasn't enough room to accommodate all the people who wanted to participate, especially during the very popular Sunday slot. Something had to give.

### A Brilliant Idea

One day she was chatting casually with some church members and she wondered what it would be like to start a new program that would be specifically designed to meet the needs of families with younger children. In her wonderings, she even named it, La Petite Program! And a new intergenerational faith formation model was conceived. Birth, as usual, would take more time and effort.

While the pressure of space was the impetus for the idea, there were other compelling reasons to pursue it. Kathie and her staff were firmly convinced that parents are the most powerful teachers of their children, but parents so often feel unprepared and ill-equipped to teach. With La Petite Program, they would teach parents how to teach their own children.

Another important need in a large church, this one has 1,900 families, is to help members feel like they are connected in a personal way. Friendships need to be made and nurtured. People need to feel like they are welcome and that they belong to a community that cares. With La Petite Program, they would develop ways for parents to interact in meaningful ways not just with their children, but also with other parents.

### The Structure of La Petite Program

La Petite Program invites families with children in third grade and younger to meet at the church twice per month for two distinct styles of programming.

#### *First Monthly Meeting:*

Families gather for breakfast on Sunday morning at 8:30 a.m. Each family sits at table together and maybe with one or two other families. Family members eat and enjoy a simple activity to help them focus on a theme that runs throughout the year. This first monthly meeting also features age-specific groupings that are focused on content from a religion textbook. After the meal and opening activity, participants are divided into the following groups:

- Childcare for children under 3 yrs.
- Preschool (3-years-old)
- Preschool (4-years-old)

- Kindergarten
- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Parents

The children are taught by trained facilitators. The parents engage in faith discussions using materials created by the Christian Family Movement (CFM). CFM is a Catholic family resource center that provide faith formation resources for married couples and for families.

### ***Second Monthly Meeting***

The second gathering in the month also begins with breakfast and table activities based upon the annual theme. Families then move through a series of learning stations where parents guide their children with a variety of learning methods. One of the stations is a permanent fixture in the monthly program. In this one, parents teach their children one of the lessons in their religion textbook. The other stations have more variety and are designed by the church faith formation staff. There are usually three or four families at a station at the same time so parents can support each other as they teach.

### ***A Home Component***

Faith formation for families is most effective when there is consistency between what happens at home and what happens at church. In La Petite Program, parents agree to teach another chapter from the religion textbook at home each month.

Parents don't complain about teaching their children. Kathie thinks that the family model is now just part of the culture because they've been doing this kind of intergenerational programming for 19 years. La Petite Program was implemented in 2006. There is room for about 35 families in the program. After the first child reaches 4<sup>th</sup> grade, the family graduates to the larger intergenerational faith formation program. Kathie reports that some families miss the intimacy of La Petite when they move on.

## **A High Priority**

St. Anthony Parish also has a parochial elementary school. In many churches that have both a school and a Sunday program, the school is the priority. Kathie reports that the intergenerational program is not an afterthought at St. Anthony. It has equal status with the school. St. Anthony invests heavily in their intergenerational programming with outstanding and ample professional staff and a healthy budget.

The results have been impressive. In the beginning 80% of the families who attended were missing the dads. Today, moms and dads attend at an equal rate. Couples are growing closer together. Families are connecting with each other. Leaders are being formed. La Petite Program is accomplishing all of its original goals and is contributing to more engaged church members of every age. For more information, visit the following links:

### **Resources**

La Petite Program Brochure: [http://www.stanthony.cc/LaPetite\\_Brochure\\_for\\_2014-2015\\_1.pdf](http://www.stanthony.cc/LaPetite_Brochure_for_2014-2015_1.pdf)  
 Christian Family Movement website: <http://cfm.org/home.html>