

Brothers and Sisters,

We've reached the "mid-point" of the first year of our LIFT program. I'd like to take some time to reflect on where we were and how far it seems to me that we've come. As I do so, I want to set forth a continuing vision for us as a parish community.

**LIFT supports the first Church which is the home** – the first place where Christ is encountered is the home. The home is a sacred place where love is first realized and natured. Parish Faith Formation supports what goes on the home and is an adjunct to the work and love that begins at home. *Liturgia* means "work of the people" as they praise God; that happens at home first.

**LIFT has become a community effort** – the intergenerational character of what we are doing suggests that the entire parish has become involved. What has happened is that folks have come to appreciate the fact that a parish is first, last, and always a community of faith. It is quite something to see people of all ages coming together to learn about the Lord, but more so to witness different generations sharing their faith with one another.

**LIFT doesn't end with the conclusion each session** – our "take home" materials allows all the participants to continue the discussions at home and to help make the home a vibrant and vital faith community.

**LIFT begins at Eucharist and moves toward it** – the central act of worship is enriched because we have been together to share our lives with one another. This leads to the following Sunday. I've noticed a difference in the way that we have been praying together, and I think LIFT is one of the reasons for that.

**There are no strangers** – folks tend to participate in the same Eucharist from Sunday to Sunday. Because of LIFT people who aren't normally with one another are able to get to know one another. I was edified after last Sunday's session as I watched two young men exchange phone numbers with one another – they met at LIFT. My suggestion however is that in the coming weeks you sit with someone you don't know either for breakfast on Sunday or dinner on Tuesday.

**Annual themes allow us to really understand** – before we started LIFT, we treated many themes, and we couldn't come to understand the depth of the tradition of the Church. Moving as we have done to explore one theme in depth each year has allowed us to appreciate our Tradition more. This will prove to enrich what we know and how we live.

**It's not about the content, it's about the process** – LIFT incorporates the best of what learning theory has to offer, and allows us to rely on one another as we journey along to learn about God, Christ, and the Church. We are still

communicating the rich lived tradition of the Church and the graced eloquence of the Sacred texts, but we are doing it in a new, livelier, and more creative way.

**Catechesis for Sacraments has not been interrupted** – we still offer particular Catechesis for Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, and in the RCIA, but done as it is in the context of LIFT encourages the entire community to celebrate with our young people and adults preparing for Sacraments.

**We live out our Baptism ministering to one another**- By baptism, we are all called to be God's light, love, and truth. As we come together in our faith sharing groups every other week, and as we get to know one another more, we can share our joys and hopes, our griefs and anxieties and minister to each through moments of joy and sadness.

**Youth Ministry has been integrated into LIFT** – as a matter of fact, we now have a “seamless” garment of all of our Faith Formation efforts. There were times when we were a bit too “compartmentalized.” Now, all of what we are doing is connected.

Lifelong Faith Formation gives us the opportunity to minister to the young, old, and everyone in between. With LIFT, we are able to minister to all parish groups. This is a blessing. We have one consistent vision that governs what we do.

I want to conclude this brief treatment of LIFT with an image for you. It is the image that concluded **Renewing the Vision**, which is the United States Bishops' document that concerns Youth Ministry. It is the familiar story of Emmaus, where Jesus is walking with the two Disciples after the Resurrection. The Bishop's wrote of that story “It became a guiding image for ministry with its emphasis on the relationship between young disciples and their Lord, a relationship characterized by presence, listening, faith sharing, and celebration.”

That is precisely what we see for LIFT: that we all come to have a relationship between we who are baptized and the Lord that is marked by those four elements. If you haven't participated in LIFT yet, I certainly want to encourage you to do so. You can join us any time. The Parish staff is available to you for questions; but more than that, do what Jesus said to those who asked him where he lived: “Come and See.”

Lots of hope,  
Fr. Mike