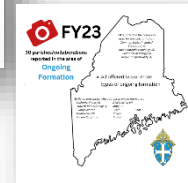
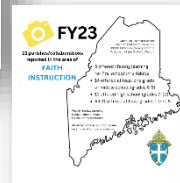
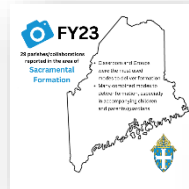
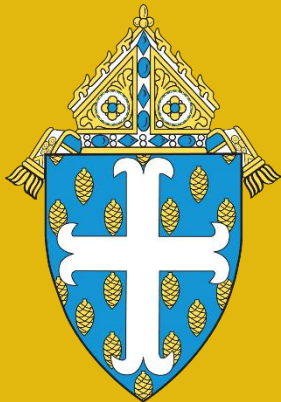


# State of Parish Faith Formation in FY23

July 2022-June 2023

Summary of Submitted Annual Parish Faith Formation Reports  
with Report on Progress in the Diocesan Catechetical Plan 2020-2027



**Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland**  
Office of Lifelong Faith Formation  
Lori Dahlhoff, EdD, director  
December 2023

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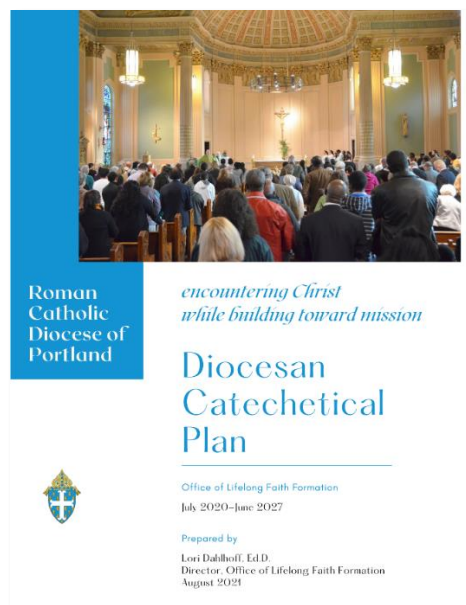
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# Introduction

## Encountering Christ while building toward mission

Jesus entrusted the Church with the mission to echo the Gospel to the ends of the earth, baptizing and making missionary disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Diocesan Catechetical Plan 2020-2027 outlines the needs, goals, and strategies guiding the diocesan Office of Lifelong Faith Formation (OLFF) in assisting our local bishop in this mission. The plan's aim is for people and parishes to encounter Christ while building toward mission, in the desire that every Catholic in Maine accepts God's gift of faith and wants to keep unpacking that gift for themselves and others, especially through participating in the sacramental life of the Church and serving one another in the world.



## Knowing and telling our story

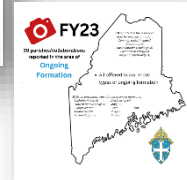
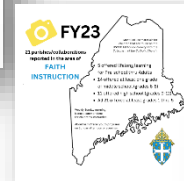
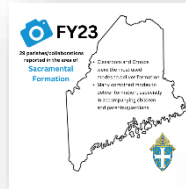
Knowing and understanding how the Holy Spirit works among local faith communities to form people for the mission is vital to being responsible stewards of the gifts and tasks given for the life of the Church in Maine. Initiating a parish visitation process as part of diocesan catechetical plan led to reinstituting an annual parish faith formation. The visits along with personal interactions with clergy and leaders revealed a need for richer information about how faith formation happens from place to place and from year to year.

Much has changed since the last full set of parish faith formation data gathered in 2014. For example, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland now includes 48 parishes across the state of Maine. Of these, 13 parishes work together within a local cluster or region in one of 5 different collaborations to provide religious education and lifelong faith formation.

Annual reports submitted for FY23 (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023) included data from 41 parishes. The current report includes five sections: Parish Information; Sacramental Formation; Faith Instruction; Ongoing formation; Resources; and Catechetical Leaders. Submitted reports varied in the details provided in each area. This is common for the first year of a new tool, but limits what can be said about our diocesan story. This summary offers overviews of the reporting for 3 areas: sacramental formation, faith instruction, and ongoing formation.

## Snapshots of FY23

The annual parish faith formation report gives glimpses of the living reality of faith formation in a parish or collaboration of parishes. These come together as snapshots of the Diocese of Portland based on the data provided by 41 parishes. These snapshots are an executive summary of what follows in this document.



# FY23

29 parishes/collaborations  
reported in the area of  
**Sacramental  
Formation**

- Classroom and Groups were the most used modes to deliver formation
- Many combined modes to deliver formation, especially in accompanying children and parents/guardians





# FY23

21 parishes/collaborations  
reported in the area of

## FAITH INSTRUCTION

Most (19) use materials for  
children that are found on the  
USCCB list for conformity with the  
*Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

- 5 offered lifelong learning  
for Pre-school thru Adults
- 14 offered at least one grade  
of middle school (grades 6-8)
- 11 offered high school (grades 9-12)
- All 21 offered at least grades 1 thru 5

Weekly Sunday morning  
is most common time  
for children's instruction.

About half offered youth programs  
on Sunday afternoon or evenings.





# FY23

30 parishes/collaborations  
reported in the area of

## Ongoing Formation

28 reported on the resources  
used for ongoing formation.

Common topics included:

Bible study (7)  
basic Catholic teachings (5)  
Eucharist or liturgy (5)  
prayer or spirituality (4)

- All offered two or more  
types of ongoing formation

10 listed presenters who addressed one or more area:

Eucharist/Mass (4)	Discipleship (4)
Faith at home/family (4)	Mary (3)
Evangelization	Grief
Mental Health	Prayer
Sacred Scripture	Saints
	Lent





## Sacramental Formation

Immediate sacrament formation prepares individuals and or families for receiving one or more of the seven sacraments and for living out the sacramental graces received for one's whole life. Parishes are expected to provide processes for initiating adults (anyone age 7 or older according to Canon Law), baptism of infants (a child age 6 or younger), a two-year process for children to receive Confirmation and 1<sup>st</sup> holy Communion along with Penance, and Holy Matrimony.

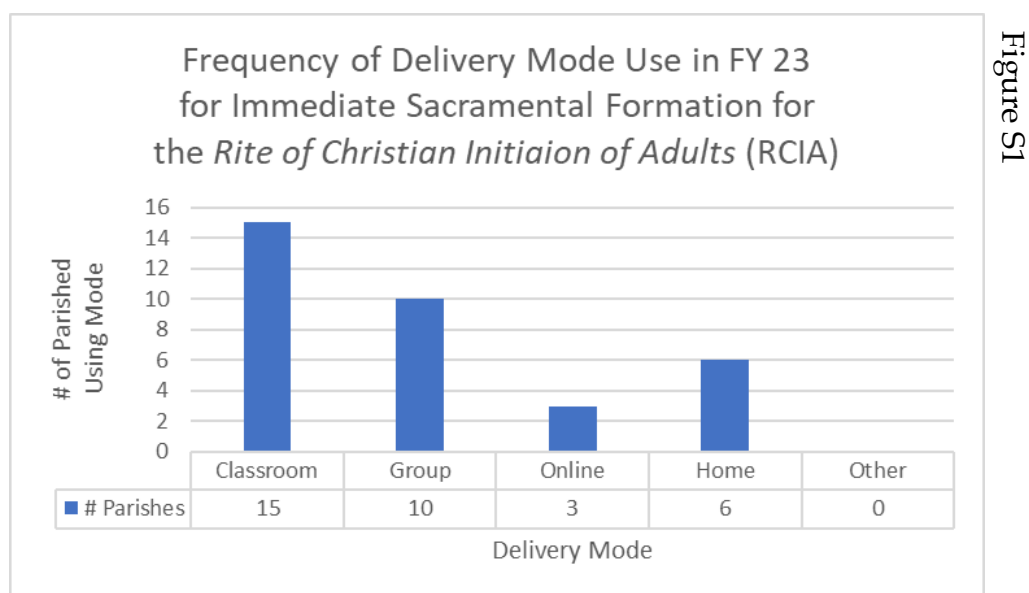
The annual report asked parishes to identify the modes used to deliver immediate sacramental formation in each of these areas. While they were also asked to provide the resources used in this formation, too few parishes specified the teaching resources used to make meaningful generalizations about this aspect of formation in the diocese. The following pages offer snapshots of the delivery modes used in each area of sacramental formation.

Questions about resources used may be directed to OLFF staff.

## Christian Initiation of Adults

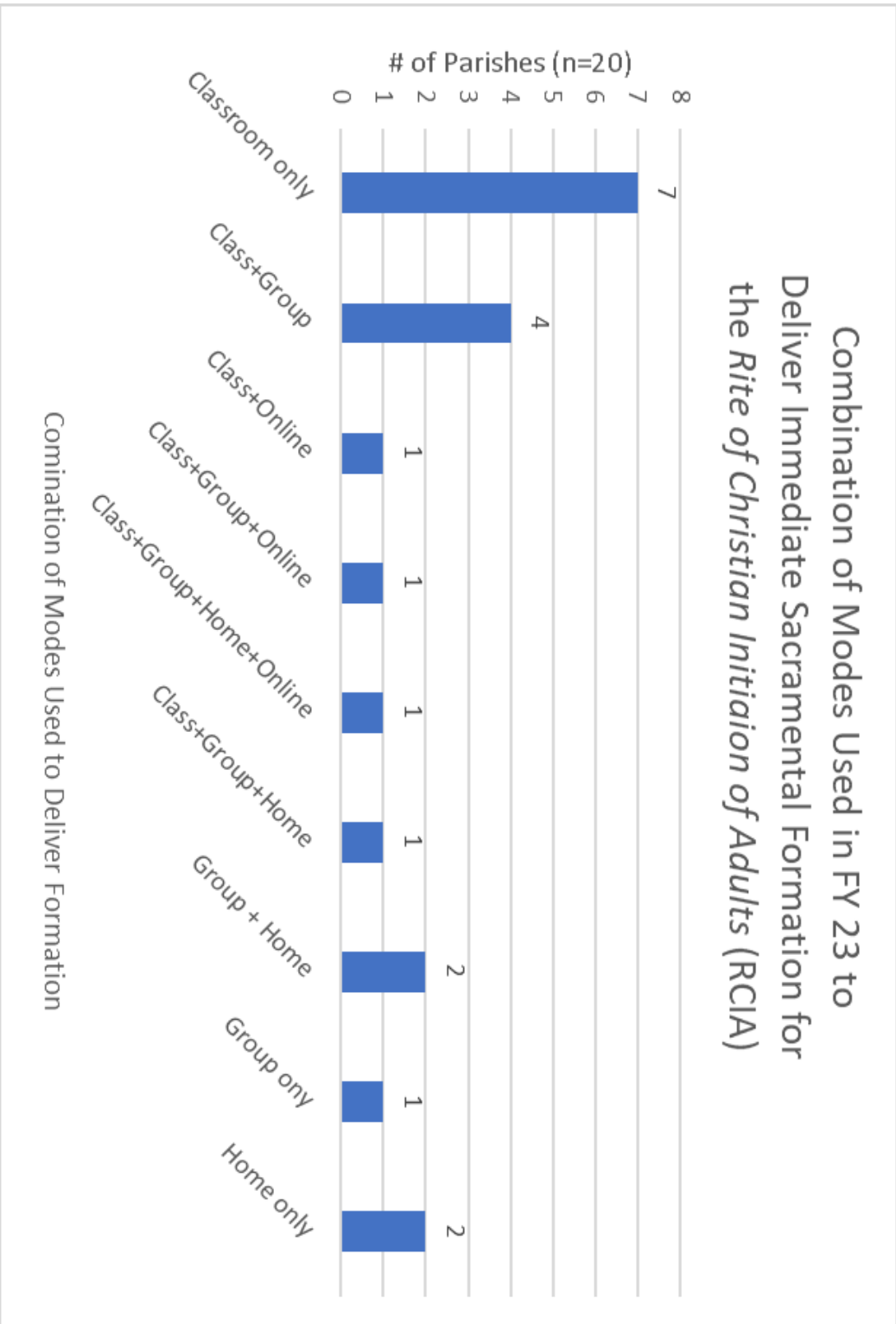
The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) sets out the rituals and norms for forming unbaptized people of catechetical age (around 7 or 8) – referred to as catechumens - for full initiation into the Catholic Church through Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The RCIA in the United States also provides rituals and norms for welcoming candidates - people who were previously validly baptized as a Christian - into full communion as Catholics. Twenty (20) parishes/collaborations reported on this area for FY23.

Parishes reported classroom and group learning as the most used modes for delivering immediate formation for RCIA. There were few differences between formation offered for adults and for children\*. (See Figure S1)



Reports also showed many using multiple modes to provide formation, though classroom-only was the most frequently used delivery mode. (See Figure S2)

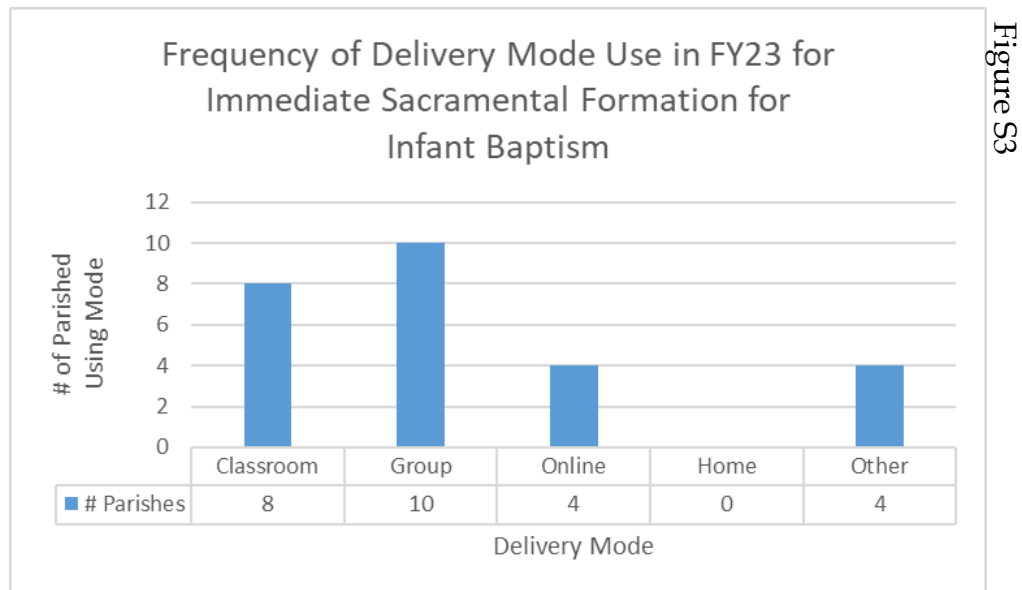
Figure S2



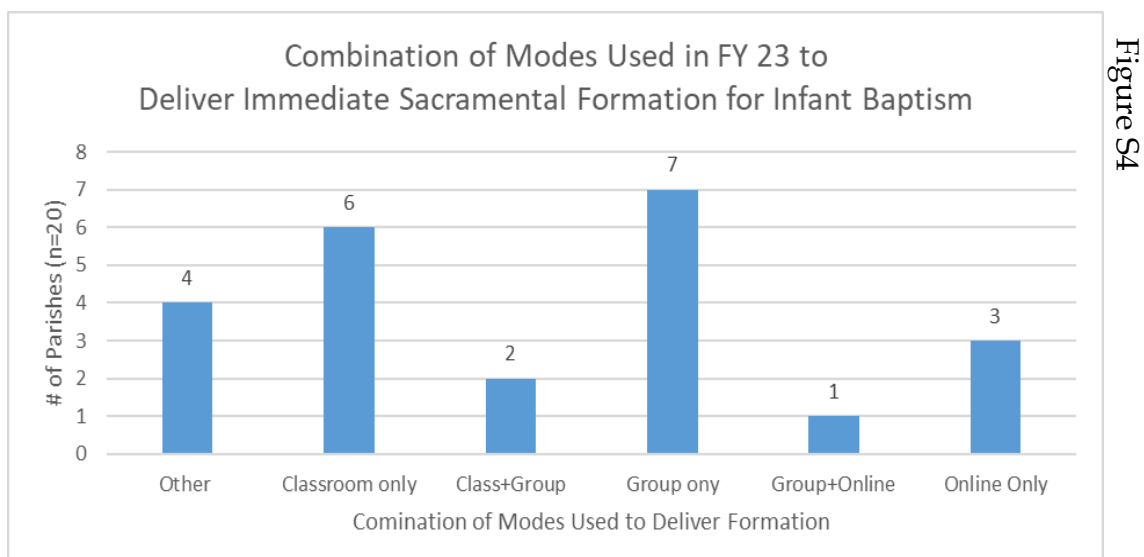
## Infant Baptism

According to the Official Catholic Directory, parishes in Maine reported baptizing 700 infants in 2022. Per Canon Law, an infant is any child younger than 7 years old. Twenty (20) parishes/collaborations reported on this area for FY23.

Parishes reported group and classroom as the most used modes for delivering immediate formation for infant baptism. (See Figure 1.C)



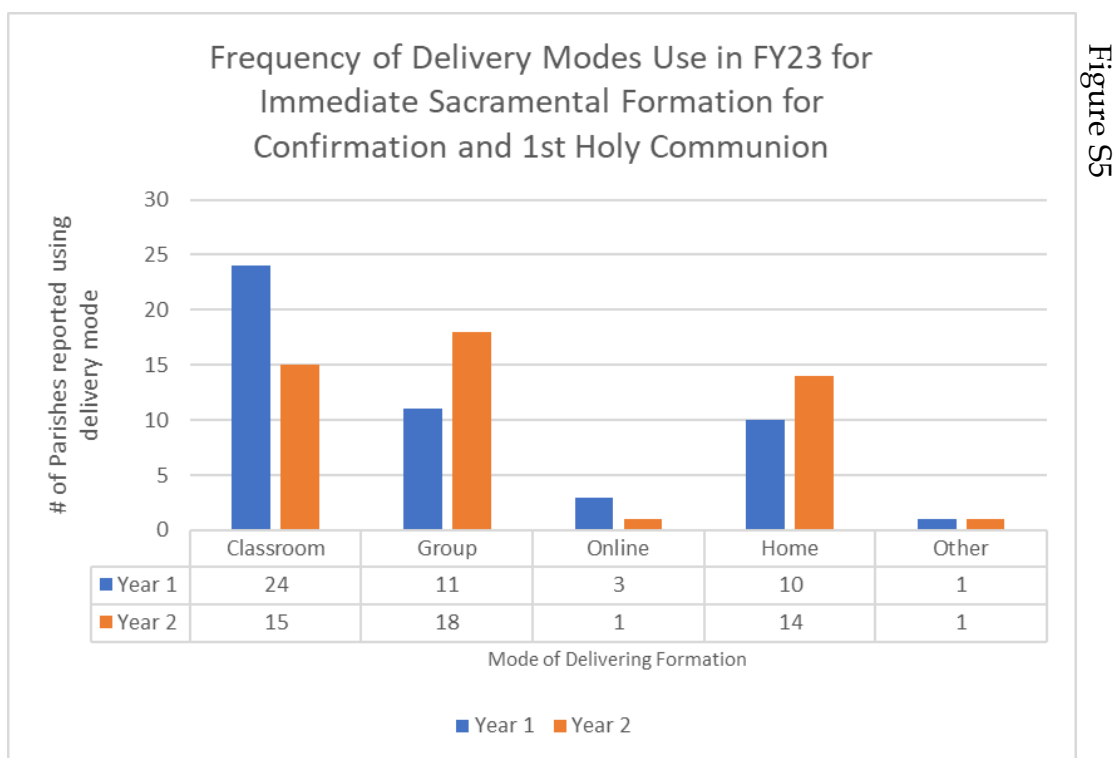
While reports showed some using multiple modes to provide formation, 65% of reporting parishes/collaborations used group or classroom settings as an exclusive delivery mode. (See Figure S4)



## Confirmation and 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Communion (and Penance)

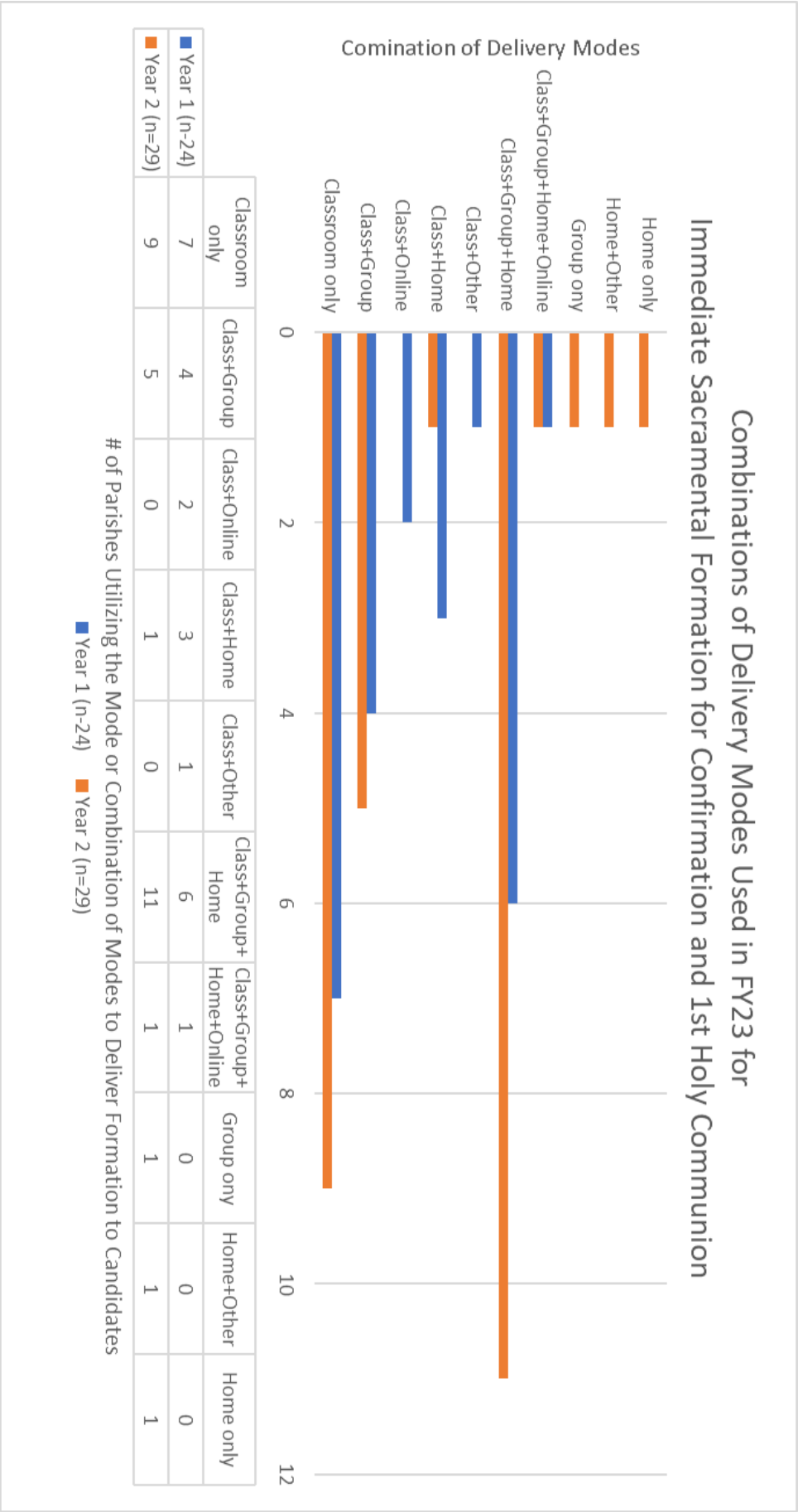
In most cases parishes utilize the two-year formation process required by the diocese to form children toward the sacraments of Confirmation and Penace and receiving their first holy Communion. For FY23 twenty-four (24) parishes/collaborations reported on their Year 1 formation and twenty-nine (29) parishes/collaborations reported on their Year 2 formation. Most parishes did not provide information about formation for Penance.

Parishes reported classroom and group as the most used modes for delivering immediate formation in Year 1 and Year 2. (See Figure S5)



For Year 1 formation, 7 parishes reported using a single mode, classroom, to deliver formation. This number rose to 9 parishes using classroom-only for Year 2. The reports showed 17 parishes utilizing multiple delivery modes for both Year 1 and Year 2 formation. While combinations varied between Year 1 and Year 2, classroom, group, and home activities were used together most often. (See Figure S6)

Figure S6



## Holy Matrimony

According to the Official Catholic Directory, parishes in Maine reported celebrating 219 Catholic weddings in 2022. Twenty (20) parishes/collaborations reported on this area for FY23.

Group was the most used mode for delivering marriage preparation. (See Figure S7)

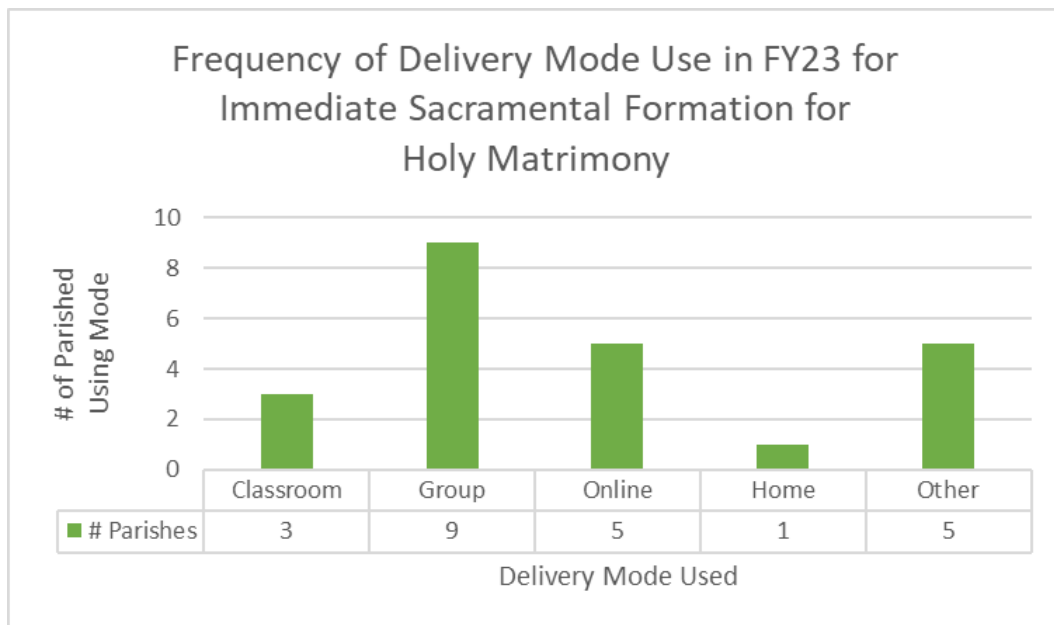


Figure S7

Only 4 parishes reported using multiple delivery modes. (See Figure S8)

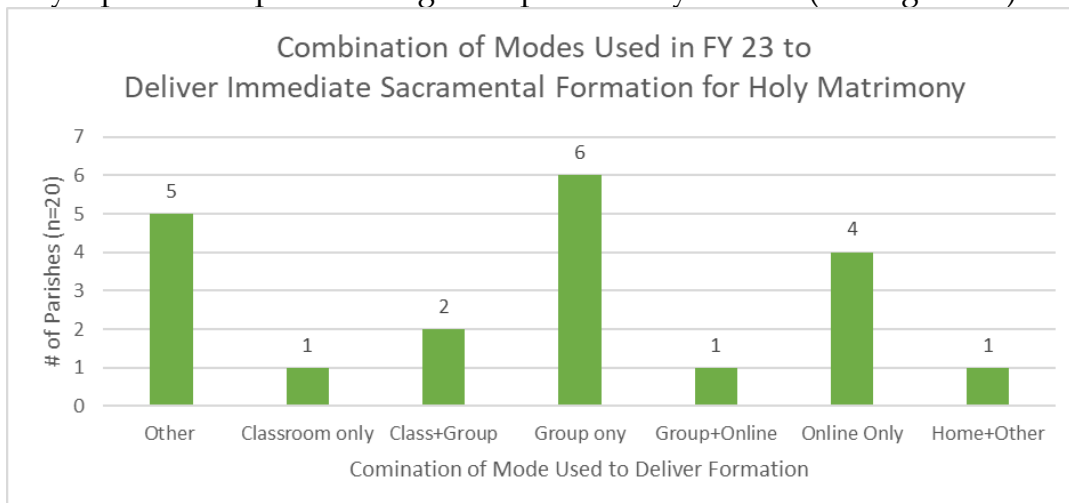


Figure S8



## Faith Instruction

Faith instruction proclaims the faith of the Church through basic, essential catechesis that responds to initial faith. It roots learners' faith in the ordinary life of the Christian community, presents the Christian mysteries organically and systematically to shape distinctly Catholic knowledge, logic, and imagination, and helps learners internalize and integrate all the components of the Christian life. Terms like "CCD," "religious education," "Sunday school," or "catechism class" relate to this aspect of evangelization and catechesis with those seeking developmentally appropriate knowledge as they mature in faith.

Twenty-one (21) parishes/collaborations reported in this area for FY23. All offered faith instruction for grades 1 through at least grade 5. Fourteen (14) reports showed faith instruction for at least one grade of middle school (grades 6-8). Eleven (11) reports showed faith instruction for high schoolers (grades 9-12). Five (5) reports showed faith instruction provided from Pre-school through adulthood.

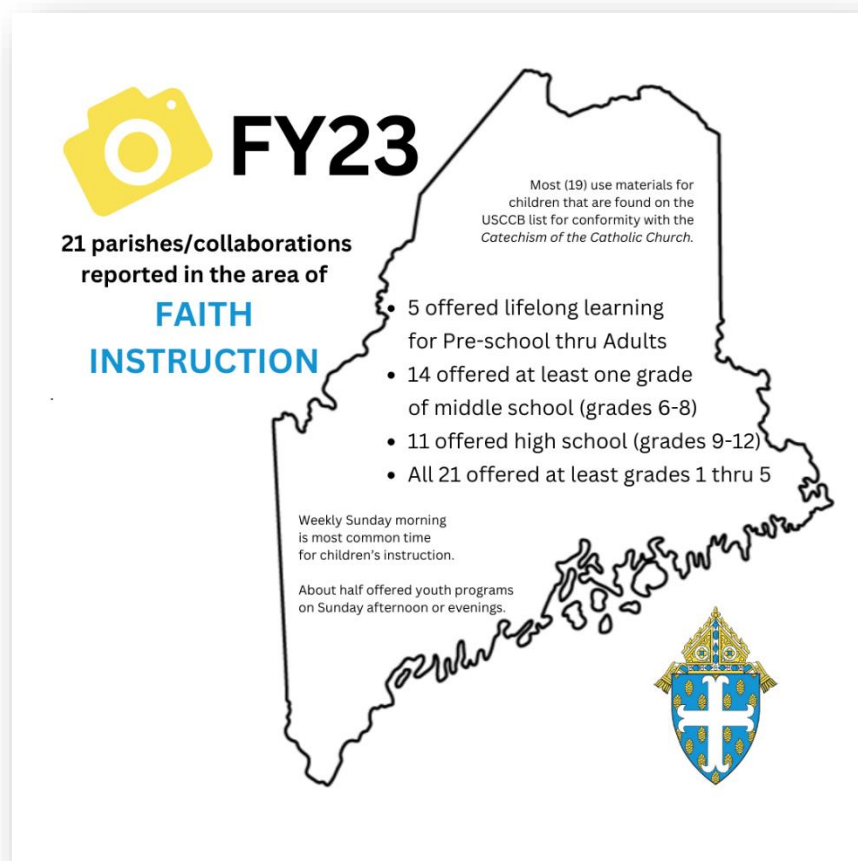
Most parishes/collaborations (19) utilized materials that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) found in conformity with *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to guide the instruction for Kindergarten through Grade 5. The most used series for these grades were *Word of Life* published by Augustine Institute (5), *We Believe* published by Wm. H. Sadlier (3) and the *Catholic Children's Bible/Discover* published by St. Mary's Press (3).

Two types of materials used, *Pathways* published by Faith and Family Life Catholic Ministries and *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, are unable to be reviewed in the USCCB conformity process due to their learning designs. However, both resources do utilize other processes to affirm orthodoxy for use in Catholic churches.

The modes of faith instruction reported for different age groups look similar to those used for sacramental formation (see Figures 1.A – 1.H). All 21 reporting parishes/collaborations utilized classroom for most age groups with 12 parishes/collaborations group learning formats. Seventeen (17) parishes/collaborations utilized multiple delivery modes in a variety of combinations.

Sunday is the most popular day of the week for faith instruction to occur (19 parishes/collaborations) with mornings before or after Mass being the most common time. A few parishes/collaborations (9) reported offering faith instruction on other days of the week. Around half of reports showed faith instruction for middle schoolers (13) or high school youth (10) offered on Sunday afternoons or evenings most weeks during the academic year.

Insufficient data reported in this area and only one year of reporting hampered further meaningful analysis of faith instruction across the diocese.





## Ongoing Formation in the Christian Life

Ongoing formation of fully initiated Catholic children, teens, and adults aims to (a) mature the living, explicit, and fruitful faith of believers at each stage and phase of life, and (b) develop the attitudes, practices, and active participation of missionary disciples. Thirty (30) parishes/collaborations reported on this area for FY23.

All reporting parishes/collaborations identified two or more types of ongoing faith formation offered July 2022 through June 2023.

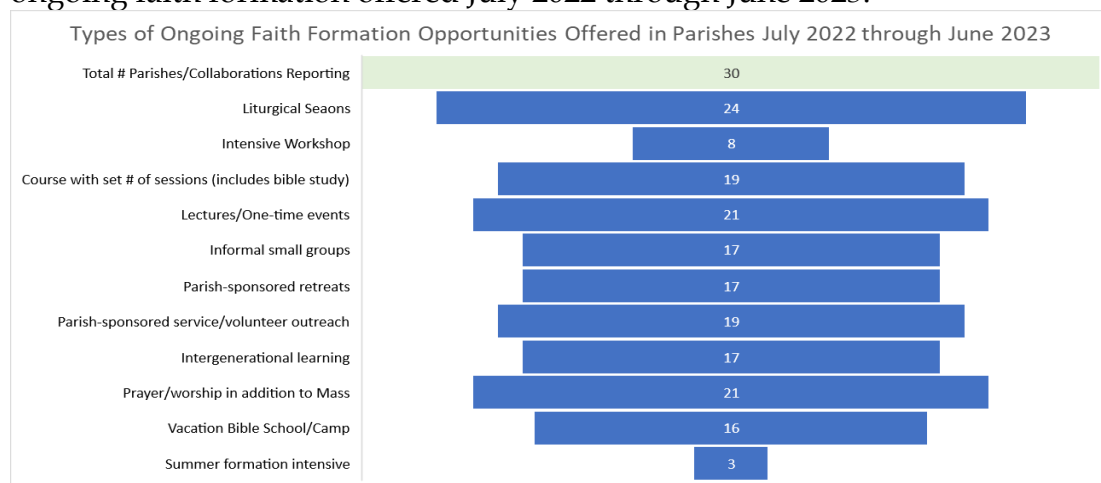


Figure O1

Twenty-eight (28) parishes/collaborations reported on resources used in ongoing formation during FY23.

The reports listed 29 different titles of print materials from a variety of publishers and 2 online services – Formed.org (6) and Word on Fire (4).

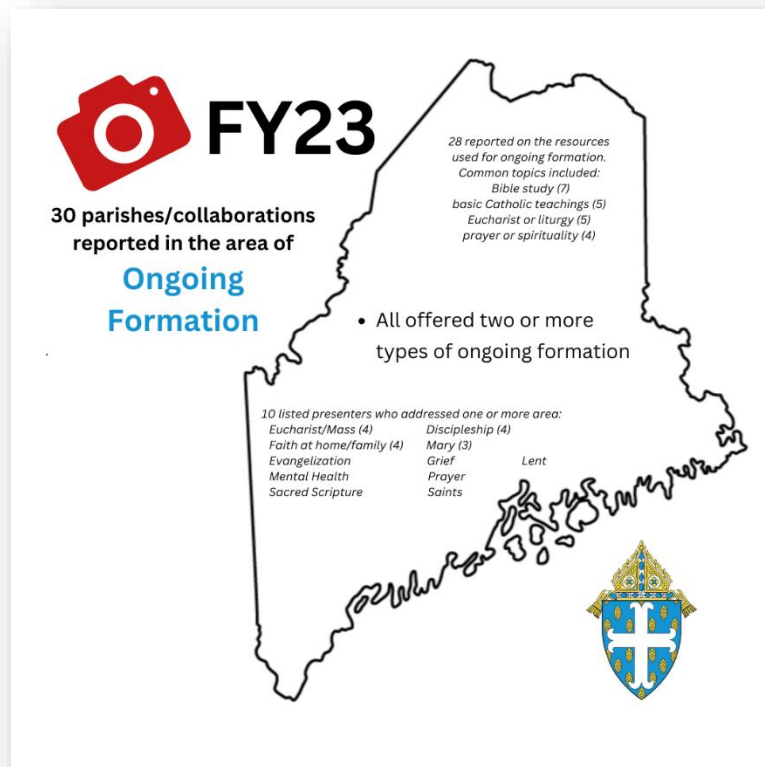
Common topics included:

- Bible study (7)
- Basic Catholic teachings (5)
- The Eucharist or liturgy (5)
- Prayer or spirituality (4)

Ten (10) parishes listed presenters utilized in FY 23. Eighteen (18) different people were identified as presenting on one or more of these areas:

- Eucharist/Mass (4)
- Discipleship (4)
- Faith at home/family (4)
- Mary (3)
- Evangelization
- Grief
- Lent
- Mental health
- Prayer
- Sacred Scripture
- Saints

Questions about specific materials or presenters used in ongoing formation may be directed to OLFF staff.



## Progress in the Diocesan Catechetical Plan

December 2023 marks the mid-point of implementing the current diocesan catechetical plan. Goal A initiatives focused on the need for training and ongoing formation of catechists and leaders are nearing completion. Work in Goal B to revitalize parish sacramental life is ongoing as is laying groundwork for identifying effective structures and models for lifelong faith formation in Goal C. Read plan details on the [diocesan website](#).



### Goal A catechist and pastoral leadership development

Objective A.1: Implement a common set of expectations for catechist and catechetical leader formation that creates a pipeline for ongoing ministry development (June 2020-December 2024)

Indicator of Success: *Publish "Pathways for Formation and Certification of Catechists and Catechetical Leaders" and related tools*  
"Pathways" was published in August 2021 along with an ["Ongoing Formation and Development Annual Report"](#) for individuals to plan, track, and reflect on their ministerial

formation. Both documents have proven helpful in consultation with parishes and individuals about based on the varied roles in catechesis, curating resources, and designing diocesan training and formation opportunities.

Indicator of Success: *150 adults across the diocese complete "Pathways" Level 1 (Basic Catechist)* With support from a Lay Continuing Education and Formation grant, OLFF offered the Echoing Faith diocesan-wide adult faith formation program. A total of 94 adults from 22 different parishes utilized the Echoes of Faith® Emmaus online learning platform since the program began in February 2022. Sixteen (16) already completed all 11 learning modules, with 5 doing the additional work for basic catechist certification. An additional 32 people are currently utilizing the platform, with 15 anticipating completing all Echoes of Faith modules in June 2024 and earning basic catechist certification.

OLFF did not meet our participation target mainly due to Catholic school personnel not participating in the program as originally planned. While there are no plans to continue with diocesan-study cohorts with Echoes of Faith after June 2024, this tool will be listed among others offered to parishes and individuals seeking basic catechist formation.

Indicator of Success: *25 parish catechetical and pastoral leaders engage with OLFF in a reflective process of annual ministerial formation planning to enhance their human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral development ("Pathways" Levels 3 or 4)*

Beginning in July 2022, OLFF offers virtual “Monthly Leader Learning Sessions” focused on practice of and guidelines for evangelization and catechesis in parish ministry. Recordings of these sessions are available on-demand on the diocesan Vimeo channel <https://vimeo.com/olffmaine>.

Objective A.2: Initiate a bi-annual parish visitation process  
(August 2021 through June 2024)

*Indicator of Success: Every parish has had at least one on-site visitation with follow-up to celebrate successes and address challenges.*

OLFF team members met with pastors/administrators and catechetical leaders at 38 parishes between August 2021 and October 2023. Two more parishes have visits scheduled for Spring 2024 with active invitations to the remaining parishes. Insights from these visits shape services provided by OLFF and collaboration with other diocesan offices. The next round of visits will start in August 2024 and will build off responses given in the annual parish faith formation reports submitted for FY23 and FY24.

*Indicator of Success: OLFF uses discussions and discoveries in parish visitation process to create a basic framework for the essential components of parish evangelization and catechesis that will be used to accomplish Goal C.*

In Fall 2022 the diocese resumed the practice of asking parishes for an annual report on local faith formation. The report outlines three essential components of parish faith formation offerings: sacramental formation, faith instruction, and ongoing formation. The data requested in the report seeks information needed to sketch an overall picture of catechesis in the state and to respond to questions commonly asked by clergy and leaders. Forty-one (41) parishes submitted reports for FY23. Reports for FY24 are due by January 31, 2024.

## **Goal B**

### **revitalizing parish sacramental life**

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**Objective B.1:** Collaborate with other diocesan offices to assist parishes re-engaging people in parish life (July 2021-June 2024)

*Indicator of Success: Majority of parishes are regularly offering adults avenues to deepen knowledge about the Sacraments and the graces offered through them*

Reviews of parish bulletins, websites, and conversations with parish staff showed most parishes utilizing one or more of the resources or strategies developed as part of the diocesan wide “Back to Mass” project begun in 2021 or the National Eucharistic Revival.

*Indicator of Success: Mass attendance levels exceed those Reported in October 2019 counts*

In October 2019, the total number of souls to have attended mass in one of the 41 reporting parishes was 120,585. In October 2021 before Phase 2 of the “Back to Mass Project”, the total number of souls to have attended mass in one of the 47 reporting parishes was 89, 237. Data is not yet available for total attendance in October 2023.

*Indicator of Success: All parishes in the diocese implement at least one element of the National Eucharistic Revival*

In October and November 2022, thirty-five (35) parishes sent one or more people to a Fall 2022 regional leader formation day focused on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and engaging in the National Eucharistic Revival. People from Hispanic Ministry, Catholic Charities of Maine, and 2 Catholic schools also participated.

In September 2023, thirty-eight (38) parishes sent one or more people to a Fall 2023 regional ministry formation day focused on full, conscious, and active participation in the

Eucharistic liturgy. Leaders in Hispanic Ministry also participated.

**Objective B.1:** Update formation guidelines for infant baptism and marriage (July 2022-December 2025)

Infant baptism was the focus of the May 2022 Clergy Institute. A key message was to shift formation efforts from one-time encounters to accompanying parents and couples beyond the date of the sacramental celebration of baptism or matrimony. The information clergy provided at the institute helped OLFF and Canonical Services revise common tools for parishes, namely an initial interview with parents in [Spanish](#) (May 2022) or [English](#) (June 2022) and customizable godparent/sponsor verification forms (updated Oct 2023).

OLFF is working toward sharing an initial draft of infant baptism formation guidelines with the Presbyteral Council in Spring 2024. Work will begin on marriage formation guidelines once agreement is reached on the basic framework for infant baptism.

## **Goal C**

**catechesis that works**

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**Objective C.1** Articulate a general framework for outreach and lifelong faith formation efforts aimed toward the living encounter with Christ and participating in the mission of the Church (July 2024 - June 2027)

In August 2023 people new to parish catechetical leadership (PCL) in the last 3 years had an opportunity meet with OLFF staff in a real-time orientation session. Materials shared in this orientation were made available to all PCLs in PCL Support group on TEAMS as an initial step toward an electronic ministry handbook. The digital format will be

easier for designated parish catechetical leaders to access and for OLFF staff to update regularly.

On October 12, 2023, the board of the Lifelong Faith Formation Association provided feedback on a working draft of the table of contents for the handbook. OLFF staff will continue work and consultation on this resource over the next three years.

A diocesan-wide Inclusion Initiative started in Summer 2023 is a practical step toward identifying models of faith formation that work for persons with disabilities and their families/caregivers. One objective is to test out a framework that parishes can use in planning, implementing, and assessing faith formation programs with an eye toward including people who are not currently participating in parish offerings. Regional forums will take place in April 2024 to expand the number of people engaged in examining current formation models and practices to ensure what parishes are providing are accessible and meaningful for everyone in local communities.