

## **The Vision for the Diocesan-wide Assessments**

### **Catholic Schools and Parish Faith Formation Programs**

What is the vision for the diocesan-wide assessments? The assessments that will be given throughout the Diocese in March to fourth, eighth and eleventh graders are not about passing or failing a test. Rather, the assessments will function as a kind of inventory, giving us a good indication of what our students have come to understand regarding the truths of our Faith. This understanding of faith knowledge about God, His loving plan for us, and all His saving works, lead to a response of faith and a firmer commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

Why is it so critically important that we know if our students are grasping and integrating the foundational truths about God? It is the fundamental reason that our young people today have to find their way through a highly secularized culture. This “wasteland,” if you will, is a situation characterized by the rejection of God, rampant materialism and the rejection of absolute moral truth, the truth which we have received from Jesus Christ.

Our fourth grade children have to know that Jesus is God; that He died on the cross and rose from the dead so that our sins could be forgiven and that we can now receive sanctifying grace, a share in God’s Divine Life through the Sacraments. For example, we cannot simply hope that our children believe that they have the incredible privilege of receiving Holy Communion, the actual Body and Blood of Christ. We want to be sure that the children know that the host is no longer bread after the priest prays the words of Jesus and calls upon the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Through the assessments we will be made aware if our eighth grade students understand the importance of daily prayer in order to have a strong relationship with God; that God created us out of love and desires to be in union with us, both here on earth in receiving the Sacraments and forever in Heaven. We want to know if the students grasp that Satan, whom Jesus called “the father of lies,” tempts us to make choices that will separate us from God which only lead to misery. Do our eighth graders comprehend that the three Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity as well as the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit give us the supernatural strength to make good choices that lead to a life of joy and peace?

The assessment for the eleventh graders is to make sure that our young people are not swindled out of their modesty and purity by being conditioned to view themselves and others as objects for sexual pleasure. If they do not understand chastity and how to practice it, they lose respect for their dignity as human persons, which can happen so easily in our culture. Our high school students will also be asked about vocation, the call of God in each person’s life, the proper formation of conscience as well as questions concerning God’s Word to us in the Sacred Scriptures. The multiple choice questions are thought-provoking and will cause good discussion in the weeks to follow, both in the faith formation sessions and hopefully at home also.

As you can see, then, the results of the assessments will be beneficial in showing us the strengths and weaknesses of the students’ grasp of the Deposit of Faith. It is through knowing who God is and what He has done for us that we come to love Him more and desire to serve Him by serving our neighbor. The point must be stressed that this is not a tool to critique teachers of the Faith. There is a distinction. The purpose of the assessments is to give to us a picture of what the students have and have not retained and understood. Of course, so much of student retention is determined by the way

that faith is being practiced at home. Through these assessments we can help parents to understand better that they are the primary educators of their children and invite them to take a more active role if that is not the current situation.

The information that we receive from the assessments will also help both teachers and parents to be more intentional in passing on any foundational truths of the Faith that were missed. A fuller understanding of God, His Church, our call to relationship with Him through prayer and how He calls us to live allows for a deeper integration of the Faith into daily life.