

Fall Educator Gathering
October 3, 2025
Diocese of La Crosse's Office for Catholic Schools

Afternoon Break-out Sessions

Trees Across the Curriculum - start at 1:00 and end at 3:30.

Location: Newman Catholic Schools' Rudolph Environmental Center

Instructors: Katie Estlund and Steve Schmidt

- LEAF, WI K12 Forestry Education and School Forest Program
- Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education
- College of Natural Resources, UW Stevens Point

Description: The trees on your school grounds offer a prime opportunity for learning, not just for science classes, but for all middle school content areas! Join staff from the LEAF K-12 Forestry Education Program for an afternoon of hands-on activities at the Rudolph Environmental Center, the Newman Catholic School Forest. Whether you teach ELA, Social Studies, Science, Math or any subject, outdoor education with a focus on trees will enrich your students' learning. High school and elementary educators are welcome. The lessons shared are adaptable for younger or older students. Participants will leave ready to step outside and use the trees on their school grounds, or head out to their school forest for more in-depth learning.

Special Notes:

- Restricted to 40 participants
- Participants will meet in the Newman Catholic Middle / High School parking lot to board a bus to take them to the Rudolph Environmental Center. At the conclusion of the session, the bus will return participants to the Newman Catholic Middle / High School parking lot.
- There is one compostable toilet at the Rudolph Environmental Center

Evangelization in the Age of Polarization: Practical Tips to Foster Respectful and Productive Classroom Conversations That Change Minds - start at 1:00 and end at 3:30.

Location: Newman Catholic High School Classroom

Presenter: Emily Geiger, Director of Education & Outreach for the Equal Rights Institute

Description: Emily, a leader in using ERI's apologetics to foster respectful and productive dialogues about abortion, will work with you to learn how to work with high schoolers who are bombarded by pro-choice culture. Emily understands it feels impossible to have meaningful conversations about controversial issues like abortion. But, rather than resort to angry debate or just avoid the topic, Emily wants students to be able to dialogue thoughtfully. This session will be especially helpful for those classrooms where students hold diverse political and religious viewpoints. How can we foster thoughtful, compassionate, and critical thinkers who engage in difficult conversations with respect? Emily will work to help you form students into adults who think through important issues for themselves and apply Catholic values to their daily lives.

Trauma Informed Care - start at 1:00 and end at 3:30.

Location: Newman Catholic High School Classroom

Presenter: RaeAnn Thomas, Director, Ascension Wisconsin Employee Assistance Program

Description: Join RaeAnn her team as they work to help you:

- Define and be able to identify the different types of trauma and its prevalence

- Understand what trauma-informed care is, what it looks like, and how it is different from other interactions
- Increase understanding in how trauma-informed care principles can be used in the classroom and individual interactions

Advocacy that Pays Off: Strategies for Maximizing Your Title Funding - start at 1:00 and end at 3:30.

Location: Newman Catholic High School Classroom

Presenter: Abigail Pavela, WCRIS Federal Funding Director

Description: Unlock the full potential of your federal Title program funds through strategic advocacy. This session will provide private school leaders with practical tools and proven strategies to strengthen collaboration with districts, navigate consultation with confidence, and ensure equitable services for their students. Participants will learn how to ask the right questions and take actionable steps that maximize the impact of Title funding on their school community.

Special Notes:

- Restricted to School Administrators only
- Abigail will be presenting virtually

Half Sessions – Participants selecting the half session option must select and attend two half sessions.
 – Each half sessions will take approximately one hour and ten minutes.
 – The first half sessions will start at 1:00 and end at 2:10
 – The second half sessions will start at 2:20 and end at 3:30

Continued Best Practices for Reading Instruction

Location: Newman Catholic High School Classroom

Presenter: Vanessa Talford, McDonell Area Catholic Schools Special Needs Scholarship Program Interventionist

Description: This is a follow-up session to morning presentation to PreK-6 Core Teachers, Interventionist, Librarians. We offering these participants the opportunity to continue their work with Vanessa to develop their practices and enhance their reading instruction.

Special Note: Restricted to PreK-6 Core Teachers, Interventionist, and Librarians

What is a Catholic Classical School (Catholic Liberal Arts)?

Location: Newman Catholic High School Classroom

Presenter: Jimmy Lynch, Newman Catholic Classical School – Holy Name, Headmaster

Description: This breakout session will focus on what a Catholic liberal arts education means and how it differs from modern education. We will discuss the Trivium: grammar, logic and rhetoric and the Quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. What is True, Good and Beautiful and how to infuse the Catholic faith throughout all areas of the school.

Dress Code: Everyone's Favorite Topic – DSP 5690

Location: Newman Catholic High School Classroom

Presenter: Thomas Reichenbacher, Superintendent for Catholic Schools

Description: Dress code is something most of us say we do not want to discuss. So, why is brought up time and time again at faculty meetings? Let's explore the Diocesan policy (DSP 5690) and discuss the different dress codes within the Diocese of La Crosse's Catholic Schools.

The Basics of AI

Location: Newman Catholic High School Classroom

Presenters: Dr. Jason Schenzel, Dean, Academic Excellence and School of Learning Technologies, and Reginald Smith M.Ed. , AI Project Manager

Description: This session introduces educators to what artificial intelligence is, how it works, and how to interact with it in accessible, everyday ways. During the hands-on portion, participants will experiment with AI tools to practice giving effective prompts, explore safe classroom uses, and identify simple entry points for integrating AI into their own teaching practice.

Special Note: Participants are required to bring a laptop

AI as Your Teaching Companion

Location: Newman Catholic High School Classroom

Presenters: Dr. Jason Schenzel, Dean, Academic Excellence and School of Learning Technologies, and Reginald Smith M.Ed. , AI Project Manager

Description: This session dives into how AI can actively support teaching and learning by enhancing assignments, assessments, and student engagement. In the workshop portion, educators will work directly with AI tools to reimagine classroom materials, design interactive learning experiences, and develop time-saving strategies tailored to their grade level and content area.

Special Notes:

- Participants are required to bring a laptop
- Participants must attend “The Basics of AI” presentation, or have a working knowledge of AI