

Adult Faith Formation in Ballarat North

Three years ago, our parish of St. Columba's decided to launch an adult faith formation course. We settled on this after we had asked our people the following questions:

- Are you interested in the future of your parish community? The Church?
- Would you like to be better informed about central issues and recent developments in different areas of Church belief and practice?

The Cathedral parish, to which we are linked because the Administrator is officially our PP, was keen to support us morally and financially, so we issued invitations to the six parishes of Ballarat, and to a couple of outlying parishes where we suspected there would be some interest. Because we did not want to impose any financial barrier, we asked only for a gold coin donation for each session (each topic had four or five sessions). This didn't quite pay our way, but we were prepared to go ahead because we believed in the project.

We settled on our topics, and planned to offer two a year, one in March and one in October, for three years. This means that now, in the middle of 2008, we have offered five topics, and are preparing for our sixth and final one in October.

We also decided to bring in presenters from beyond this city, not because there aren't any here but because we wanted to break some new ground. We brought from Melbourne the best presenters we could find.

Our general idea was not only to give people an opportunity to "dip their toes" into the deep and rich well of what the Church has to offer, but also to answer an obvious need among our committed and faithful people.

Our program took this form:

1. An Introduction to the Scriptures
2. The Treasure Within: Pilgrimage to the Heart
3. A New Look at the Sacraments
4. Ways of Praying
5. Images of God in the Post-Modern Parish
6. The Impact on the Church of Vatican II (and whatever happened to it...)

When we're finished, we will have had three men and three women who have led the sessions! We hold the sessions in one of the lecture rooms at ACU, and they have mostly been on a week-day night, 7pm until 9pm.

So far, Nos. 1 and 5 have proved to be the most popular. One lady who attended the first session later went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and sent us a postcard to say it was thanks to our course that she went. Just lately she informed us that she is booked on another, and says it is entirely our fault that her and her husband's superannuation funds have been blown on these pilgrimages.

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