

# SEAT AT THE TABLE

DIOCESE OF ERIE – FAITH FORMATION OFFICE



## **An Overview of the Model of Lifelong Faith Formation for Diocese of Erie** *Draft updated 11/1/2019*

Enjoy this 11-minute video that provides context and background for Seat at the Table: <https://youtu.be/5BkT3-gl8tI>

Our diocesan pastoral planning effort called us to move to a model of lifelong faith formation. Our focus is no longer on Kindergarten through Confirmation; we now must think of how to help people grow in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ from birth until they go home to meet the Lord.

In 2018, Deacon Steve Washek introduced the model of “encounter, engage, deepen” as our approach to lifelong faith formation. The front porch has been our image for the place of encounter, and we knew we needed an image for where engagement and deepening happen. For those, we chose the image of seats around a dining room table. A dining room table is familial, nourishing, and Eucharistic. Christ is among us here and now, communing with us, inviting us to deeper relationship at every stage of our life—and He nourishes us for each phase of the journey, as He is the very meal we share at table.

The pastoral plan made clear that a “one size fits all” approach will not work in our current cultural landscape. Our model of different types of chairs around the table for different stages of life reflects our commitment to be creative, adaptive, and responsive to the needs of our people.

It is not enough for the Church to say, “All are welcome!” We must know and anticipate the varying needs of our diverse brothers and sisters and make sure the place we prepare for them is prepared with them in mind. The needs of children, young adults, and older adults are all very different, and there are also diverse needs within each of those stages of life.

The Seat at the Table model draws upon research from diverse disciplines (theology, psychology, sociology, etc.) as well as from over 100 pastors, clergy, and lay ministers across our diocese. It details spiritual questions and invitations that might commonly be experienced across different stages of life. It then calls us to tailor our ministerial responses to meet the unique needs of each stage of life. We can then say confidently to our brothers and sisters, “We have something to offer you here. There is a place prepared specifically for you. When you are not here, your seat is empty, and we miss you. And your seat always is waiting for you.”

The Seat at the Table model is not intended to be interpreted as a series of requirements for parish ministries. Rather, it provides us with a common language and best practices, as well as the opportunity to collaborate, share resources, and provide for a common experience throughout the Diocese of Erie. Parishes will be encouraged to draw from the model to meet the unique needs of their parish communities when they are assessing the needs of their parishioners and the strengths, gaps, and areas of growth for their ministries.