

Jill Proehl Echoes the Word of God

by Madonna Kuciejczyk-Kernan

“Catechist” describes the ministry which works to make faith ‘living, conscious and active.’ The word catechesis is derived from an ancient word meaning to echo the word of God. Those called to faithfully and authentically echo the word of God in each age and to each new generation are called “catechists.”

The Catechist in the Third Millennium

I remember clearly when Jill Proehl said “yes” to being the catechist to the youth in the sixth and seventh faith formation community. The Youth Commission had discerned that this age group would benefit from another year of spiritual formation before entering the Confirmation exploration process. Ann Quigley had guided this group of children/now youth for a number of years but Ann had decided to leave the Cronan community. Ann is a gifted educator, especially of middle-school youth, and a deeply spiritual soul; I felt sad Ann would no longer be guiding these lovely youth. I knew that Jill was a talented educator of gifted middle-school students, that she had been a catechist of middle-school youth at her previous parish and had received catechetical training so I asked Jill if she would be the catechist for this group. Like many of us in the Cronan community, Jill is a very busy person—as Jill would say, “crazy busy.” Besides working

Jill and Jack Proehl



fulltime as an educator, she also is a full-time parent, parenting three children who at that time were between the ages of eleven and sixteen. Her family was heavily involved in scouting, band, sports etc etc etc. At first, she only said yes to leading the first session. I have to thank Jack for her willingness to continue sharing her gifts as a catechist. As Jill explained it, “Joe—my husband—and I talked about it, and discerned, and I came to an epiphany while leading them. Jack is my last, and I have almost stepped aside many times because I’ve “been there, done that” with my other two. That’s not fair to him. “I do need to be more present in his life, and so this was a wake-up call to me that I should lend a hand.”

When I read Jill’s first e-mail to the parents, I knew God’s grace was flowing in her saying “yes” and that the Cronan youth would be blessed by her guidance. Here is an excerpt from that first communication.

“The last icebreaker we did was Take a Stand. I made an imaginary (actually it was a crease in the carpet) line on the floor, and I asked about twenty questions to which they were to stand on the line if their answer was in the affirmative. Some

were relatively easy to answer, such as displaying our preference for soda, pizza, music, etc. And some were weighty questions dealing with conscience, social justice, fairness, and faith. The kids all enjoyed getting to know each other and seeing where everyone stood on issues, We analyzed the pattern of our answers and talked about beginning that transition into adolescence and from where we draw our strength in order to make these choices and decisions. I also challenge the kiddos to dedicate themselves to their faith community . . . and to remain committed to what they want for themselves as a budding young adult in this faith community.”

Now Jill, became a Cronan catechist in true Jill – Proehl – style – with lots of enthusiasm, energy, creativity, time, and planning. She sought advice about resources. She bought catechetical resources. Jill continued this commitment for three years. She guided these youth through *The Confirmed in a Faithful Community* Confirmation exploration, and Confirmation preparation process. During the time of exploration the youth visited Catholic and Protestant worshipping communities including the St. Francis de Sales Latin Mass, a first Mass of a former Cronan parishioner at St. Clare and Francis Ecumenical, and Epiphany United Church of Christ.

The youth (and their parents) that Jill has guided appreciate her efforts.

JULIA HOFFMAN:

I loved the retreat. It was so much fun and I felt like I got to know people a lot better. I appreciate all the time that Jill put into it.

ABBY HAGEMAN:

Jill was helpful with any questions or concerns that we had and always included us in decisions.

HEATHER HAGEMAN:
I am so grateful to Jill for leading such spiritual discussions with my daughter. She is a very talented educator.

AUSTEN KRUEGER:
Jill accepted me into the group when I started, even though I joined later than everyone else. She helped me prepare for my Confirmation, and I couldn't have gotten through it without her. Thanks Jill!!!

They joined other members of the faith formation community in making granola bars for Haiti and sandwiches for Karen House. Jill was often excited guiding the youth, and I enjoyed reading her posts. This was one of my favorites: "I celebrated life with my Confirmation class. We read about the Jewish scrolls being handed down, and when Timothy put them in his mouth, they turned to honey. My kids got a kick out of eating honey on crackers to celebrate the presentation of Bibles to them as they begin their year long journey to Confirmation!"

As part of the Confirmation preparation, Jill did the lion share of planning and guiding the Confirmation retreat. I asked the Confirmandi to share with their sponsors what they enjoyed about the retreat and they were bubbly as they spoke about it. Jill was so delighted with the retreat that she came back and her first e-mail to the families was brainstorming a yearly retreat for the high school youth.

The Confirmation liturgy was Spirit-filled, reflecting the enthusiasm that the youth brought to this celebration from the years of preparation. Two boys from Chaminade were confirmed with our youth. Their families raved about the liturgy being the best Confirmation they had ever attended, that their sons felt welcomed and felt like they belonged, and that they wish their sons had received the kind of Confirmation preparation that was evident in the Cronan youth. I appreciate all the ways Jill has made faith formation enjoyable and meaningful for the St.Cronan youth. Thank you, Jill. Saying "yes" when the Spirit tapped you on the shoulder three years ago, blesses us all.

Reconciliation



Madonna: *Why do you think the Good Shepherd went to look for the lost sheep?*
Grace Bolesta: ***He's gotta find it because everyone counts.***

Members of the Schmitt, Mantese, Middendorf-Bolesta and DeHart families are pictured after celebrating the First Reconciliation of Elliot Schmitt, Grace Bolesta, Rianna DeHart, Matteo and Mary Mantese on April 30. Fr. Gerry Kleba and Madonna Kuciejczyk-Kernan joined them in the celebration. The Hageman family had celebrated Peter and Matthew's celebration of the sacrament at an earlier time.