

# Catechetics at St. Irenaeus

## History

Religious education was first established at St. Irenaeus in 1968. Sr. Jean Kennedy was hired in 1972 as the first Director of Catechetics. She was in charge of first through sixth grade until she retired in 1984.

The classes originally met in either homes or schools. As the program grew, the classes started meeting in the hall and rectory basement. There were approximately 50 children per grade and 24 catechists. By 1973, there were about 300 students enrolled for grades first through sixth, creating a demand for about four classes for each grade.

In 1973, Pat Egan was hired to create a program for junior and senior high. There were 120 students in seventh and eighth grade and 16 sections were created to accommodate the number of students. Interestingly, all 16 of the catechists were men. Grades nine through twelve met in the catechist's homes because the church simply did not have enough space. Twelve couples taught these grades, which was again a unique circumstance. The ninth grade had between 60-75 students. Tenth grade also had 60-75 students. Grade eleven had three catechists and 45-55 students. Twelfth grade had approximately 50 students. The high school program continued to run in this manner until around 1984. The church was built in 1984; along with that the hall was renovated allowing for space for 12-14 classes.

Mary Cummings was hired in 1980 as the first youth minister. The group of teens met on Wednesday evenings. Fr. Dan Homan met with Pat Egan-Myers in regards to starting a retreat center at St. Benedict's Monastery in Oxford. He hoped that they would send teens there and he could speak with them. The retreat center was named Subiaco and St. Irenaeus has had a permanent union with it since. Our teens have been going to Subiaco for more than 30 years. Both the ninth grade and youth group attend retreats there. In the 1990s, Mary created Project People, a summer service project for the teens to help serve the community. The teens stayed at Subiaco while they worked. The program was a huge success.

## Sacramental Celebrations

### Catechetical Program Numbers between 1968-2017

Celebration of First Communion	2,500-3,000 children
Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation	2,500-3,000 children
Celebration of Confirmation	2,800-3,200 students
Catechists	2,000-2,500 teachers
Teacher Aides	200-400 aides
Parental participation in sacramental programs	7,500-10,000 adults

## Charitable Programs

The religious education program has always consisted of faith, prayer, formation, and service. The young people have participated in many outreach programs throughout the years. Since there was not a Christian Service program until approximately 1988, the following are programs that were created by catechetics since it was founded.

- The religious education program organized clothing drives for the Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.
- Fr. Green drove a large truck to the Quito Center in Washington D.C. The Center would then transport the goods to Mexico and Central America.
- St. Irenaeus joined forces with St. James in Ferndale to build two water wells in El Salvador.
- Religious Education connected with St. Rose in Detroit to assist seniors with Christmas gifts and food.
- Lighthouse and St. Vincent in Pontiac became part of the giving tree.
- Freedom House in Detroit was another group that was adopted at Christmas time. Pat Egan-Myers conducted the program with more than 60 parishioners assisting. It is estimated that at least 600 gifts were given out. The cash amount predicted from all the gift cards and gifts collected totals more than \$18,000.00.
- The children have been involved in special programs with the retirement homes and assisted living centers in the parish. Suzie Pollock led this ministry. Grades first through eighth went once a month to put on special events for the residents. These included Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter parties. This program ran from 1985 until 1998.
- The religious education staff started the St. Nick's party in the late 1990s. Fr. Nick was the first Santa Claus. Kathy Freer ran the program until around 2012 when it was taken over by the social commission.
- The Giving Tree was later renamed Roses in December. It is a joint effort between catechetics and Christian Service. Through the years, it has expanded greatly under the leadership of the Christian Service coordinators; Pat Busch, Jen Gerada, and Cindy Monaghan.
- St. Rose has been a key part of the confirmation program. In the 1990s, the students would go to St. Rose and put on a Christmas party. Since 2001, the party has been held at St. Irenaeus.
- OCIMA began in 1998 at St. Irenaeus. Fr. Nick Amico had established the organization in 1978. After Fr. Nick and Pat Egan-Myers went to Guatemala in November, Pat discussed adopting this worthy program with Fr. Mitchell. Fr. Mitchell agreed and since then the program has continued to grow and develop. Pat started the raffle around 2002 as a major fundraiser. Close to \$500,000.00 has been raised for OCIMA. As the program expanded, food packing and other works such as a nutritional center and nursing program were added. The parish has sent more than 20 staff and parishioners to visit the sisters, students, and people of Guatemala.
- The parish joined together with Deacon Richard Hulan to provide over 2,000 gifts to the Paquette Homes for the military. The parish participated in this Lenten project for more than two years. A member of the parish provided the trucks to transport the donations.

## Departments and Commissions

When Pat Egan came to St. Irenaeus in 1973, the only commissions were religious education, finance, social, and perhaps a worship. The religious education commission was chaired by Sr. Jean Kennedy. The team consisted of three or four married couples. The parish was very active in faith formation at that time. There were at least 15 homes that held the Church, World, and Kingdom program. The commission began a series by Fr. Dwyer in the 1970s. About 50 parishioners participated in the program.

There was also a four-year certification program for the religious education teachers. In the course's 20 year existence, approximately 400 men and women were certified. In the late 1990s the programs changed but some 50 catechists continued with faith formation once a month with Pat Egan-Myers at the catechists' meetings. Around 1986, over 150 parents attended special programs on Sunday morning after the 11:30 mass. The program was on film and was conducted by Clayton Barabeau. The program continued for about four years.

In the 1980s, speakers were brought in during Lent and Advent, the events were well attended. Fr. Halfpenny, Fr. Buddy, Fr. Kosnik, Bishop Gumbleton, and several scripture scholars from the seminary were some of the speakers featured. In the 1990s, Fr. Dan Thotakara came to celebrate mass and then teach meditation and prayer. This brought in between 120-150 people. Tragically, Fr. Dan died of cancer around 1998. Throughout the years, Fr. Tony Gittins, Megan McKenna, Dolores Curran, Bishop Flores, Bishop Cepeda, and others have spoken at St. Irenaeus.

## RCIA

Fr. Kuzava hired Terry Topolinski in 1988 to establish the RCIA program in the parish. Terry developed a wonderful program with great catechist leaders: Jane Giblin, Dr. Keith Shuert, Pat and Paul Busch, Maureen and Robert Magdaleno, and others. Terry left the parish around 1990 and Pat Kolon was hired to do RCIA along with Christian service. She left in 1993 and Pat Egan-Myers was asked to assume this position. Pat became the Pastoral Minister to Fr. Mitchell. She developed the RCIA as well as programs of outreach to the Eucharistic ministers and those who visited the sick. Pat remained the Director of Catechetics and the section head for grades 6, 7, and 8.

## Buildings

St. Irenaeus operated out of the rectory and worship space for about 20 years. Monsignor Kuzava renovated the old worship space when the church was built in 1986. This created an office, eleven classrooms, youth room, and pastoral office occupied by Pat Kolon and Mary Lou Zobel. The building was gutted and renovated to our current building by Fr. Mitchell in 2000. This addition created a new parish hall and pastoral offices.

In 2001, after Fr. Mitchell left, Pat worked with Chuck Stewart and other members of the parish to wire the building for internet. Other members of the parish assisted in setting up this primitive system. Some of the helpers were Bob Kurkevich, Neil Turrett, and Jonathan Nash. Jonathan is the technician now and has brought the system up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In 2015, Pat installed smart televisions in the classrooms so that frequently used programs could be easily accessed. Jonathan again was instrumental in making this work. Of course, Christian Service, finance, and others also use this equipment.

## Christian Service

The Christian service department was started by Fr. Mitchell with the hiring of Pat Kolon and Mary Lou Zobel. Mary Lou created a wonderful program with Bread for the World, Habitat for Humanity, outreach to Pontiac, Lighthouse, etc. She hired Pat Busch to replace her. Pat instituted the nurses program and outreach to parishioners who were homebound. Pat hired Jen Gerada to replace her. *Further information about the history of the Christian Service department can be obtained from Jen or Cindy.*

## Worship

Fr. Frank Pollie developed the worship department when he came to St. Irenaeus. He hired Deacon Richard Hulan to be the worship coordinator and the deacon of the parish. Richard became responsible for registering parishioners, conducting wake services, and meeting with families of the deceased, which Pat was in charge of previously. Pat turned over her role of doing wedding rehearsals as well. Additionally, Richard took over handling the baptisms and all other programs involving weddings, funerals, etc. at St. Irenaeus.