

## Summary of Living Faith, Cumming, GA

Living Faith is appropriately named, for they began holding worship services in 1999 in a *funeral home*! The congregation, located in Cumming, Georgia—most unsatisfactorily known as the former headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan, but don't hold that against them—is an actively growing suburb (3/4 of the residents of the upper middle class community are new over the past 15-20 years) of Atlanta. Since moving out of the funeral home into their newly built sanctuary, the congregation has experienced from 2006 at least a 5% annual growth rate, which also coincides with the call of Pastor Tim Droegemueller as Pastor.

Beginning around 2010-11 Pastor Droegemueller began using a discipleship formation process aligned with the ancient catechumenate. He constructed the process from the outline of the ancient catechumenate in chapter 8 in Dr. Arthur Just's book, *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service*. From Just they titled the four phases of their catechumenate: "Exploration, Separation, Transition, and Incorporation." In the post-Pentecost season, they use the readings of the 1-year lectionary as the basis for Exploration. Their aim is to let the Word do its work, leading to formative teaching and conversation. In the season of Epiphany, they study the Small Catechism as the basis for Separation from life outside of Christ to life in Christ. During Lent in the phase of Transition, they train those people for Christian life who are ready to go forward to Baptism and adult confirmation. Their catechumenate culminates during Holy Week with the Triduum services and Baptisms and confirmations at the Easter Vigil. In the Easter Season, they Incorporate people to live as part of the Body of Christ gathered around Christ's Body and Blood in Holy Communion. The essential theme of their catechumenate and congregational life is heart-to-heart combat. Catechumenal formation leads those incorporated into congregational life to battle for ongoing, lifelong learning that shapes life in Christ and to battle to bear witness to Christ for others.

To accomplish all this Living Faith stresses a strong catechetical focus. The goal is to shape a discipleship in God's Word, teaching all that God has commanded. For them, discipleship in God's Word leads to understanding what the church is and that their individual lives should focus around the life of the body of Christ. The catechumenate, in Pastor Droegemueller's words, "is intended to help them to commit to being 'all in'." Anyone exploring baptism or confirmation at Living Faith, including those coming from other non-Lutheran denominations, participates in their catechumenate. The expectation of serious commitment to the process appears to have contributed to a strong retention of those participating, joining the congregation, and embracing lifelong catechesis.

To demonstrate the congregation's commitment to the catechumenate, there is a room in the church dedicated to catechumenal instruction. Throughout the four periods, the catechumens meet for one hour midweek and then also on Sunday mornings during the Bible class hour. While participation during the period of Exploration is not as regular or high as desired, participants are led by the Catechist, Don Langenbeck, through primarily lecture format, into detailed study of the entire Scriptures, developing a biblically focused and systematically informed knowledge of the Word. Pastor Droegemueller leads the last three phases of Separation, Transition, and Incorporation. Formation of a faith-enlivened piety through participation in the congregation's liturgy is a primary stress throughout these periods. In Lent 3 they walk through the liturgy. In Lent 4 faith-filled stewardship of the Christian life is the focus. In Lent 5 they delve deeply into prayer and how to pray. In Lent 6 they prepare intensely for participation in the Lord's Supper.

The catechumens are publicly presented to the congregation as those committed to pursuing baptism or confirmation on Lent 1. They then walk through the catechumenate until Pentecost with sponsors assigned by the Pastor accompanying them, providing Christian friendship and accountability for participation. The ritual high point of their journey is Baptism and/or confirmation at the Easter Vigil. Pastor Droegemueller marks the formal end of the catechumenal journey with a rite of vocation at the end of the Incorporation phase on Pentecost. But the ongoing journey has only begun.

The reflections of the catechumens demonstrate that through their experience of the catechumenate they come to know Living Faith as a family of God manifesting the love of God in Christ. They enter a family that knows the love of God in Christ through the Word they hear and are taught. Through that teaching they experience Pastor Droegemueller's care for their authentic human lives lived in Christ and Christ's love. (Furthering that teaching and relationship building will be the new position of catechumenate director at Living Faith, filled by Annie DeLuca). Relationships within the family of God at Living Faith are forged through that pastoral care in the catechumenate and through the congregation's embrace in the Sunday liturgy. The end result is living faith, strength for the lifelong journey of faith, within the community whose faith lives in its catechumenate.