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y dear friends,

**Faith Formation:**

The last

Saturday of September brought together over 500 catechists and teachers (almost exclusively volunteers) who give of their time and energy to share the teachings of the church with the young people of the diocese in religious education programs conducted in our parishes and schools. Seventy of our parishes were represented at this gathering which has grown each year over the past three years. The work they do is the Lord's work of bringing the good news of the Gospel to our young people to support and strengthen what goes on in families. The task is to share the faith of the apostles and to encourage young people to respond to Jesus' call to follow him.

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Their task is not an easy one since most religious education classes take place after or outside school hours whether on Saturdays, weekdays or between or after Masses on Sunday. As I looked out over the crowd that gathered for the catechetical conference at West Catholic High School on Sept. 25, I could not imagine those who might be more important in their service—to proclaim the very word of God. The ministry of these faithful workers is sometimes taken for granted.

We expect all our catechists to be certified to teach religious education and offer numerous ways for this certification to take place. The content of the teaching must reflect the teaching of the church and catechists often need assistance with methodology. Our catechetical certification is always a work in progress. I am especially grateful



>> Church leaders from Grand Rapids commemorated the ninth anniversary of 9/11 and recognized local public safety personnel during an interfaith community prayer service on Sept. 10 at the Cathedral of Saint Andrew. (From left) Dr. Sharif Ahmad Sahibzada of the Islamic Center of West Michigan; Very Rev. John Geaney, CSP, rector/pastor of the cathedral; Rev. Canon Robert Schiesler of Saint Mark's Episcopal Church; Rev. Mr. Larry VandeVoren, Kent County Sheriff Dept. chaplain; Rev. Cheryl Molhoek of Bethlehem Lutheran Church; Rev. Anne Weirich, associate pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church; Bishop Walter Durham of the Praying Hands Ministry Church of God in Christ and Most Rev. Walter A. Hurley, bishop of the Diocese of Grand Rapids.



>> Artists and the public mingle during opening night of ArtPrize at Cathedral Square, Wed., Sept. 22.

to Sr. Barbara Cline, FSE who heads our faith formation office for her commitment and dedication to this important work.

The work of religious education and our own personal growth in faith is not limited to children and young people. As adults, through our prayer, study and

reflection we need to grow in our faith to continue to persevere through the complexity of our lives. A 12th grade faith may not serve us well at 30, 40 or any other age. For this reason and many others, we are fortunate in the diocese to have the Catholic Information Center (CIC) operated by the Paulist Fathers in

the Cathedral Square Center. The CIC is designed to bring an understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church and to offer a deeper and more reflective awareness of our Catholic faith to anyone interested in learning more. Courses are available year round. The catalogue of fall courses is available on our diocesan website: [dioceseofgrandrapids.org](http://dioceseofgrandrapids.org) or visit [catholicinformationcenter.org](http://catholicinformationcenter.org).

**Respect for Life:** Each October we are asked to pray more intensely about and continue to support efforts to promote respect for human life from conception to natural death. “Every human being, at every stage and condition is willed and loved by God. For this reason every life is sacred. To deprive someone of life is a grave wrong and a grave dishonor to God. Because we are created in the image of God, who is Love, our identity and vocation is to love. Pope Benedict calls this ‘The key to our human existence.’” (Respect Life Program 2010). Pope Benedict has stated in his encyclical letter *Charity in Truth*: “To the tragic and widespread scourge of abortion we may well have to add in the future the systematic eugenic

programming of births. At the other end of the spectrum, a pro-euthanasia mindset is making inroads as an equally damaging assertion of control over life that under certain circumstances is no longer deemed worth living. Underlying these scenarios are cultural viewpoints that deny human dignity.”

In June of this year the Bishops of Michigan issued a letter called *A Call to Conscience: Faithful Citizenship and the Common Good*. It was made available to all parishes. Among other matters it contains a reminder of our moral obligation to participate in the democratic process; to form our consciences based on Scripture and Catholic social teaching, and to evaluate candidates through the lens of faith. With the forthcoming November election pastors and others are often pressured to distribute election materials prepared by a variety of individuals or organizations that do not always reflect the church’s teaching or practice. It may be worth noting that the Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors reaffirms the long standing prohibition of the distribution of election year materials

in parishes “unless published by the diocesan bishop, the Michigan Catholic Conference or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops”.

**ArtPrize 2010 at Cathedral Square:** Now in its second year, ArtPrize, is an international art competition held in Grand Rapids, in which the winning artist is determined solely by public vote. As an ArtPrize 2010 Exhibition Center, Cathedral Square attracted over 5,000 visitors during the first four days of the event beginning Sept. 22. Cathedral Square is featuring the work of 32 artists from the U.S. and Canada through Oct. 10. The church has a long tradition of supporting the arts and seeing ArtPrize at Cathedral Square is an expression of that support. With the assistance of Meijer, Aquinas College and other sponsors, we welcomed ArtPrize’s invitation to be part of this growing event, in which our participation highlights the presence of the Catholic Church in West Michigan. To learn more, visit [dioceseofgrandrapids.org](http://dioceseofgrandrapids.org).

With my best wishes to all,

Bishop Hurley



➤➤ ArtPrize 2010 entry at Cathedral Square: *Peace Garden* by Kate Diedrich who formerly taught art at Immaculate Heart of Mary School.



➤➤ Bishop Hurley joins fifth and sixth grade students and their teacher from Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Grand Rapids, on Sept. 24 during ArtPrize to view and talk about the art on display at Cathedral Square.