

Discipleship Institute History

2014 through 2023

It all began with a question? The adults in the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) asked it. "Where do we go from here?" The process of the RCIA leads these budding Christians to ask questions and to go in search of the answers...in short to learn more about their faith.

Both Harry Fledderman and myself were facilitators within this process and we discussed possibilities for these folks. We encouraged them to take part in the GIFT program, but it seemed that more was needed. At that time, Harry was involved in teaching in El Paso in the summer, at an institute for catechists. We started wondering how we could get something started like that at Lourdes.

We checked with Nancie about developing some kind of adult program at Lourdes and she gave us the "go ahead" to explore options. We put the ideas to paper, took the proposal to the pastoral council, and got their blessing along with the Pastor's blessing to go forward. We also got a third member of our planning committee. So now we were three: Anita Hallman Kowalski, Harry Fleddermann and Jim Wielgosz. In dialogue with Nancie Chmielewski we developed an adult education program we called, The Discipleship Institute. First offerings included Scripture sessions, Bible study, "How to" sessions on working as groups, communication, etc. and Theology.

In our many discussions (the three of us), we came to understand that what we were about was helping ordinary Christians to understand that they were not "volunteering", but that it was their responsibility as Disciples to further the "good news" of the Gospel. Out of this came the Parish Ambassadors, and Building Bridges. We eventually added a fourth member, Cathie Slater (our cheerleader!) and continued planning (with Nancie), to bring more programs to help nurture the faith of parishioners.

Then came the brutality of the police on people of color, and with it an awareness on our part of how much we didn't know about prejudices among us. We began a more active programming working with the Social Justice Committee and the GASIC group to inform, discuss, pray and "act". We offered Building Bridges programs to inform and the Social Justice Committee followed up. We began Book discussions so that we could identify within ourselves what needed to be changed.

Then came COVID, and we had to make more adjustments. We decided to utilize Zoom and continue our programming. We were able to do Panel presentations with the help of Social Justice Committee and Steve Szymanski (Social Justice Liaison), and through these to open up real dialogue with people of color that continues even now. We had a full year of learning about prejudice, specifically our own role in it. Through this experience with COVID and zoom, we not only realized the need to collaborate within the parish (other committees/ groups); we realized how we needed to provide more ways for the disabled and homebound to be a part of the community.

Nine years later, the Discipleship Institute is an established vehicle forming "disciples". The team is seven strong. We challenge, we suggest, we collaborate, we bring dialogue to the forefront, and we pray...always together! We walk together in this faith of ours, claiming to be disciples, working to bring about the Kingdom of God.

Anita Hallman Kowalski

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