

✨ Faith Formation Spotlight Jenny Nielsen- St. Luke Parish, Ogallala

1. How long have you been in parish ministry?

I am currently serving at my home parish, so I suppose that my ministry began as soon as I could don an apron and make gravy for the turkey dinner with my mother, or come clean the church with my grandma! But as an adult, I began as a catechist, for my son's 7th grade class in 2018. I stayed with that class through Confirmation, absorbing the class ahead of his as well. After Confirmation, the parish was in need of a DRE, and I began serving in that role.

2. What one scripture passage or saint that inspires your ministry, and why?

A Saint that inspires my ministry is Mother Teresa. Sometimes ministry (and life for that matter) can be overwhelming. I try to remind myself, that I cannot solve all of the world's problems in one day, but I can approach each time I encounter our parish youth, with enthusiasm, with kindness, with warmth so that they are excited to be here with their wonderful teachers and hearing God's message for them, for their families and lives. Mother Teresa said, In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love. And my other favorite is - Spread love wherever you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier.

All of the youth in our parish have different experiences with family, life, school, activities etc. I try to remind myself of that each week, to make sure that I am doing what I can to support the catechists, and the students. I believe, that thinking of Mother Teresa, helps me to do my best to support them.

3. What's something surprising or unique about your journey into faith formation?

It still surprises me that I wasn't always sure I wanted to be Catholic! What a crazy thing to say, right?! I was born, baptized and raised Catholic, attended catholic school and received three sacraments by age 8. When I was 16 years old, I had the incredible opportunity to live in South America. I lived in a city of (back then) 8.5 million people. I found myself exploring all different religions and beliefs. I'm a bit of a nerd for knowledge and I wanted to know about different faiths, I was asking ALL the questions. I had the opportunity to visit quite a few places of worship, and it was a moving experience for me personally. When I returned a year later at 17, I think I was really prepared in my heart and my "whole self" to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, and as an independent decision maker, to renew those baptismal vows and choose the Holy Spirit.

4. What's your favorite part of working with children, teens or adults in faith formation?

The questions! Sometimes we get these amazing questions from all different age ranges and I am just in such awe of the mind and the soul and their capabilities. The things that these young people think about and situations they find themselves in, are important. And what is really important?? That we have a parish, and people that are willing to walk with, pray for, and grow in their faith with these young people. When I used to teach (when my son was young) my favorite part was actually knowing these kids. I knew them from school, from activities, from birthdays, from church and from

community events. I felt like they had such a better connection to the curriculum because they knew the lady delivering it. From early on, I was Charlie's Mom. I don't think half of them remembered my name, but I would get a shout in the grocery store, a wave at the stoplight. I miss that connection. I was the goofy mom, who had more fun than the kids, as long as the rules weren't being broken. My son is out of school and grown, as are his friends and classmates, so now I'm regular ol' Miss Jenny, trying to look for new ways to inspire new kids!

5. If you could host a dinner with three saints, who would you choose and what would you ask them?

First, would have to be Pope John Paul II. By the way, I don't think dinner would be long enough! Can we amend this question to say "week-long retreat"? I really feel like in his life and his papacy, he encountered so much!! Including world events, change, and growth and evil; so much happening in the world during his life, and his views, abilities and his words are inspiring. Second, would be Mother Teresa, for all the reasons mentioned above in the "saint who inspires your ministry" section! The Third, Saint Peter! To have walked with Jesus, to have been a witness, full of faith AND sometimes doubt, to have been called to be the fisher of men... amazing and inspiring! Can I have a 4th Saint? It would be St. Therese of Lisieux. She is my saint, as well as my great grandmothers for which we were both named! I was able to visit her national shrine, and it was a beautiful experience. Her words have stuck with me. You know well enough that Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them. I would have endless questions for all four of these amazing people, and yet I probably wouldn't be able to speak! Can I change your question again? Can we make it a week-long-zip-the-lip-and-listen retreat?! Hahaha That might be just perfect for me.

6. What's a hobby or interest outside ministry that brings you joy or helps you recharge?

What helps me recharge!? What a great question. I suppose animals and travel! Which actually do NOT go hand in hand. They're fairly contradictory actually. I am a full-time rancher of beef cows! And when you have animals, it's very hard to travel anywhere. I love the peace of life in the country, and with all the animals. But also, I was bitten by the travel bug in my youth, and I love to see new places, meet new people and honestly, I love the hustle and bustle of cities and this may sound really weird, but I just love airports! So essentially... peace and noise - those are the things that fill my cup!