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# INFORMED

THE FORMED NEWSLETTER FOR PASTORS AND PARISH LEADERS

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## FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

Dr. Ben Akers

I am excited to share with you this newsletter, which is designed for engaged pastors and parish leaders. Just this last fall, I began in my new role as the executive director of FORMED. For the previous five years I served as the associate dean and associate professor of Theology in the Augustine Institute Graduate School (Augustine.edu). I also led the Archdiocese of Denver's Biblical School and Catechetical School for six years, working closely to help pastors and parish leaders form their lay faithful into lifelong disciples of Christ. I see FORMED as an incredible resource to supplement your parish's mission and apostolic endeavors. We have an incredible treasury of sacramental preparation and parish formation video programs, Lighthouse Talks, and eBooks. These could never replace the service you give your parishioners, but they can be utilized to support your pastoral work. In addition, our Leader's Resource site ([leaders.formed.org](http://leaders.formed.org)) has everything you need to get the most out of our programs and the platform.

I am thrilled about our upcoming release of *Lectio: The Case for Jesus* by Dr. Brant Pitre. As a professor, I have used Brant's book for years, and I am so excited that it will now be available as a Lectio series. This book has always impacted my students, which is why I am so hopeful that Brant's Lectio study can and will impact your parishioners. Dr. Pitre does a masterful job presenting the historical evidence for Christ and the authenticity of the Gospels. This incredible new offering is a valuable resource for all seeking to be faithful disciples of Christ, and it is my pleasure to announce that it will be available on FORMED this Lent. Thank you for your support and for what you do! Let us pray for one another.

## COMING FOR YOUR PARISH THIS LENT . . . *LECTIO: THE CASE FOR JESUS*

With limitations on gathering as communities still in place, reaching parishioners and strengthening their faith has become increasingly critical. This Lent, the Augustine Institute is grateful to offer our FORMED parishes a new program: *Lectio: The Case for Jesus*.

In nine 40- to 60-minute sessions accessible to your parishioners on the FORMED website, Dr. Brant Pitre answers the key question of faith: Who is Jesus? Dr. Pitre presents evidence from early Christian and non-Christian writings that attest to the authenticity, authorship, and dating of the Gospels. Timed to lead up to the Triduum, Dr. Pitre looks in-depth at the gospel accounts of Jesus's Crucifixion and Resurrection and the proclamation of his divinity.

The first four sessions answer Catholics' common questions about the Bible and forcefully refute some popular misconceptions. Are the Gospels reliable accounts of information about Jesus? Were they indeed written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Are the Gospels folklore or, as Pitre explains, ancient biographies? When were the Gospels written?

The second two sessions look at the statements that Jesus made about who he was. How is he the fulfillment of two key prophecies in the Book of Daniel? What are the New Testament passages in which Jesus reveals to his disciples that he is the one true God?

Sessions seven and eight explore Jesus's death and Resurrection. What do the details surrounding Jesus's trial and death reveal about his nature and his mission? How are the empty tomb, Jesus's appearances to his disciples, and the fulfillment of Scripture passages the evidence for Jesus's Resurrection?

In the last session, Dr. Pitre answers questions regarding the material covered over the course of the study.

Dr. Pitre's powerful presentations will strengthen your parishioners' faith, allowing them not only to answer skeptics' questions, but more importantly, to stand firm and profess that Jesus is truly "the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Access to *Lectio: The Case for Jesus* opens on February 17, Ash Wednesday. To purchase leader and participant guides for small-group study, please visit <https://catholic.market>.



## HIGHLIGHTS ON FORMED

As the new calendar year begins, encourage your parishioners to add a spiritual component to their resolutions by taking advantage of your parish's subscription to FORMED. Each program is intended to deepen your parishioners' faith, leading them nearer to Christ and strengthening the bonds of your parish community.

This month, the Augustine Institute highlights the following program:



### **Forgiven**

*Forgiven: The Transforming Power of Confession* explores the grace and healing offered in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, showing how this sacrament of mercy reveals the depth and bounty of God's love. By looking at how God has revealed his mercy in Scripture and examining the rite itself step-by-step, *Forgiven* communicates God's invitation to each one of us to experience his infinite and indescribable love in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

## NEW ON FORMED



### **The Search**

What is this journey in between the event we call "birth" and the one we call "death"? Are you leading yourself to a destination that you have in mind, or are you prepared to let God lead you to a destination beyond your last breath? What do you want from your life during the in-between? The questions are there. And the answers are, too.



### **The Wonderful World of Benjamin Cello**

Follow Benjamin Cello, a winsome country gentleman, as he leads his friends on song-filled adventures through the Land of the Baptized Imagination. Whether it's dancing in the artful beauty of Pennywhistle Park, hearing the hallelujah hoedowns of the Big Ol' Barn, or reading deeply in the mysterious and elevated Book Endless Book Tower, *The Wonderful World of Benjamin Cello* will captivate your children with the beauty and purity of a God-breathed imagination!

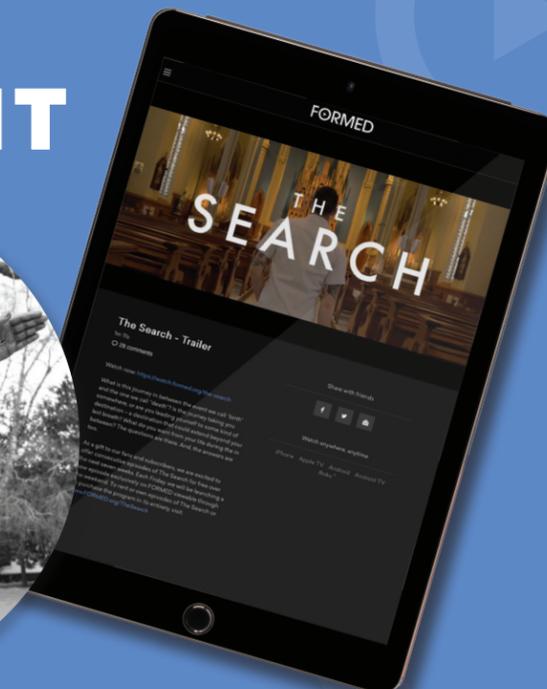
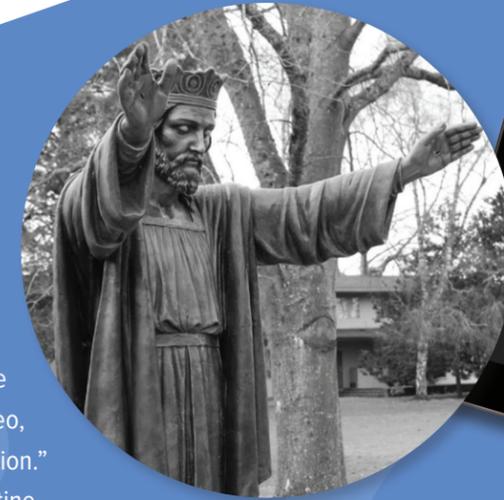


### **The Next Pope by George Weigel**

Drawing on his personal discussions with Pope Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis, as well as his decades of study and writing about Catholics from every continent, George Weigel examines the major challenges confronting the Catholic Church and its 1.3 billion believers in the twenty-first century. These are the challenges the next pontiff must address as the Church enters uncharted territory. To what is the Holy Spirit calling this Church-in-transition? What are the qualities needed in the man who will lead the Church from the Chair of Saint Peter?

## PARISH SPOTLIGHT

### **The Search opens a channel for grace in Christ the King Parish, Milwaukie, Oregon**



Julie Onderko, the director of evangelization at Christ the King Parish in Milwaukie, Oregon, had been "on the lookout" for a parishwide evangelization program for two years. She felt it should include having people get together to share a meal and watch a video, followed by a "nonjudgmental kind of discussion." When she watched the promos for the Augustine Institute's *The Search*, Onderko said she "just knew this was it."

The timing seemed like it couldn't have been worse. The country was in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most groups, other than families, would have to meet virtually. With Christ the King's subscription to FORMED, however, parishioners could access the program's seven sessions on their phones, computers, or televisions.

Onderko presented the program to her pastor, Monsignor John Cihak, who was enthusiastic. The two thought that a January launch would give them time to figure out all the logistics.

But while praying intently in the parish chapel in mid-July, Onderko felt the Lord was telling her, "No, now. Don't wait. Go now."

Thus began what Onderko called "a scramble" to get the program launched at the end of September. She drafted a letter for the pastor to send to all ministry heads, asking them to serve as virtual- or in-person group leaders. She took advantage of a free online sign-up program to organize and fill the groups. The pastor promoted the program in his homilies, regular Tuesday talks, and in a video created for the parish website.

"The Lord has good things in store for us; there will be awesome graces that are coming," Monsignor Cihak told his parishioners.

"There's nothing like it in the Catholic world right now," he said. "I want everyone to be a part of it."

Despite a hurried launch in the middle of a global pandemic, between 350 and 400 people from the parish's 1,246 families joined groups to watch *The Search* and participate in discussions. "*The Search* is very entertaining and so beautifully done," said Onderko, who has heard positive reactions from a wide range of groups—from high schoolers who "are eating it up" to the woman in Onderko's own small group who said that her initially reluctant family members were "watching all the videos."

"That relationship of people growing together and asking questions builds a bond," Onderko said. "That's part of *The Search's* recipe for success."

With Christ the King's parishioners' positive reaction to *The Search*, the parish decided to hold a retreat after week five with talks on the Holy Spirit, Reconciliation, Jesus in the Eucharist, and the power of personal prayer. The retreat included Eucharistic Adoration and the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The final two weeks of the seven-week program followed, "leading up to the doorstep of Advent," Onderko said. The parish has already ordered the discussion guides for a second offering of *The Search* during Lent.

"It's going to be like a wave that just gains momentum," Onderko said.