

From the Smallest of Seeds: Encouraging Parishioners to Use FORMED



“The pulpit announcement is key, supported by a bulletin announcement with the name of a good movie or talk and how to sign in. It takes very little time and effort, and it has such good fruit.”

Shel Conner

FORMED administrator, San Secondo D’Asti Catholic Church, Guasti, California

Father Louis Marx served as pastor of San Secondo D’Asti Catholic Church in Guasti, California, for 19 years. In the last two years of his pastorship, Marx battled an illness that had him in and out of the hospital. Wanting to be sure that his parishioners had quality spiritual nourishment during the times he was away, Father Marx signed the parish up for a subscription to FORMED and asked parishioner Shel Conner to promote the Catholic online platform.

The first program that the parish used was *33 Days to Morning Glory*, with daily reflections to draw the faithful nearer to Christ through devotion to his mother, Mary.

“That made FORMED strong from the gate,” Conner said.

Since then, Conner has hosted five Bible studies at home, using content from FORMED. The parish hosted date nights around *Beloved: Finding Happiness in Marriage*. After eight Saturday evening Masses, couples were invited to come to the parish hall where tables were set with candles and flowers. They enjoyed a catered dinner and dessert, watched one of the *Beloved* videos, and then broke into small discussion groups.

“Everybody loved it,” Conner said.

Still, Conner needed to find a way to get parishioners to take advantage of the content on formed.org in their own homes. Conner, who works for the Augustine Institute, knew that FORMED’s videos, talks, movies, and cartoons could enrich parishioners’ faith—if they watched them. But Conner’s full-time job meant that she had limited time to devote to promotional work.



“It helps a great deal if the pastor shows his enthusiasm from the pulpit. People want to do what their pastor is doing.”



Shel Conner

From that need to do something simple, Conner hit upon an easy way to drive parishioners to the site. She committed to writing a one- or two-line pulpit announcement that promoted one of FORMED's movies or talks for the week, including recommendations for children's content as well. The same information went into the weekly bulletin with a reminder of how to sign in.

In the five and a half years since that simple beginning, the number of San Secondo parishioners who are active on the FORMED site has steadily grown. The initial launch garnered a few dozen registrants. Each week, the number increased, mostly by twos and threes. Today, 500 parishioners regularly visit the site to take advantage of its Catholic content.

The tiny mustard seed of drafting a simple announcement for the lector to read at each weekend Mass has turned into a flowering plant, and Conner has been blessed to hear stories from parishioners of how FORMED's content bore fruit in their lives.

One mother praised the FORMED cartoons that teach kindness and other virtues, radically different in tone from what they might see on network and cable television.

"When the children are happy and being kind to one another, the whole household is a better environment," she told Conner.

Another parishioner, the mother of nine children, told Conner that she used to dread making dinner but now looks forward to it. While cooking, she now listens to a talk on FORMED, creating what she calls "a mini-retreat in the kitchen."

What's more, the mom continued, her children overhear what she is listening to, sparking "faith-centered conversations with them."

Another woman told Conner that she and her husband started listening to or watching something on FORMED each evening. The material fed their conversations, improving not only their faith, but their marriage as well.

But it was a man who approached her one day after Mass whose story really took Conner aback.

"I want to thank you," he said. "FORMED saved my life."

He went on to tell Conner that he had been downsized from his job nine months prior and, at age 60, was having trouble finding employment. He was driving for a rideshare service, went through a break-up with his girlfriend, and didn't have enough money to cover his next house payment. Restless, worried, and unable to sleep, he went on the FORMED website. There, he watched the first episode of SYMBOLON, the series that explains the Catholic faith. He binge-watched episodes for the rest of the night.

"I have faith again," he told Conner. "I have hope again. I'm not suicidal."

Conner believes that her own experience of the effectiveness of a weekly pulpit announcement is encouragement for ministry leaders and staff members in other parishes that have a FORMED subscription.

"That's the thing," Conner said. "It takes very little time and effort, and it has such good fruit."



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