

Introducing Apologetics into the Diocese of Bridgeport

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As the Director of Apologetics, I see myself as responsible for three main tasks: teaching Catholic apologetics, organizing opportunities to encounter the Truth, and accompanying people through their questions. The first task is obvious: teaching the faith (*what*), reasons for belief (*why*), and how to communicate the Truth with grace (*how*). The second task (organizing opportunities) is detailed in the second (“Services”) section. I see these events as opportunities to encounter Christ in keeping with the vision of The One. The third task, accompaniment, captures my approach: I want to be present and accessible to the people I am serving.

Vision

I will briefly articulate in this section my vision of apologetics and some general goals that I hope to accomplish in the Diocese. First, although apologetics is usually understood as defending the faith, which has merit as a definition, it runs the risk of creating combative and defensive believers. In order to avoid this problem, I believe apologetics must be connected to a larger notion of intellectual formation. By “intellectual formation” I mean the acquisition of intellectual virtues or habits that are conducive to hearing the voice of Truth. This more holistic approach will help people deepen their knowledge of and intimacy with Christ and so competently engage our ever-changing world. The main virtues I would like to impart are summarized in the acronym **F.I.R.E.** I have chosen this acronym due to my awareness of the strengths and limits of apologetics; just as fire can be positive but also destructive, the same is true of apologetics.

- **Fidelity to Christ and the Church.** *Rather than elevating the apologist, a truly **Catholic** apologetic is supposed to be obedient to and magnifying of Christ and the Church.*
- **Integrity in argumentation.** *Apologists should aim to fairly represent their interlocutors and give answers that are honest with the facts rather than convenient; one should not oversell their case.*
- **Rigor in research.** *This virtue consists of using the best and latest scholarship on a particular matter and ensuring that one is truly acquainted with the subject matter on which they are speaking.*
- **Empathy towards others.** *Given our polarized and tribalistic culture and even the intense existential nature of religious questions, apologists must demonstrate understanding and sensitivity with whomever they interact.*

Second, my goal is to communicate to Catholics in the Diocese **what** the Churches teaches, **why** she teaches what she does (which I consider the essence of apologetics), and **how** to live out and communicate the truths of Catholicism. It is crucial that Catholics learn to be conversational

about their faith and thoughtfully reflect upon *why* they are believers. St. Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:15, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense (*ἀπολογία*; apologetics) to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect.” The first Pope exhorts us to always be ready, meaning he assumes that followers of Christ are thinking about their reasons for belief and are prepared to give an account of the hope within them. Before we can engage with our secular culture and truly transform it, we must first ensure our own house is in order. I hope to create a culture of thoughtfulness in this Diocese, where believers can see how apologetics can deepen a relationship with Jesus Christ, the One Who is Truth, and where even those who are no longer Catholic or are not Catholic can be given sincere answers to their deepest questions.

Services

I will share in this section the services that I intend to offer the Diocese as a whole and to the two main audiences that the bishop has assigned to me, parishes and high school juniors and seniors.

Diocese: Catholics in the Diocese will be intellectually stimulated by and with the Catholic tradition, closer to one another and humanity, and prepared to share the Faith “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

- **Promotion/Assistance:** I intend to promote the other ministries in the Diocese, such as the guilds and Institute for Catholic Formation, and assist in their success.
- **Distinguished Speakers:** At least once a calendar year, a distinguished apologetics speaker will be invited into the Diocese. I would like for this speaker to be the author of the book being read in apologetics groups (see below).
- **Mentorship:** I will be available through either a (work) phone call (ZOOM, too) or online form to schedule a meeting with people in a public and secure location.
- **Summer Intensive Retreats:** These three-day-long retreats will introduce and deepen people’s awareness of the content and soundness of Catholicism. Two will be offered throughout the summer.
- **Saturday Morning Conversations:** I will travel to various coffee shops to have conversations from 9-11am open to the public. These meetings are meant to be friendly and informal.
- **Testimony Nights:** An intergenerational panel of Catholics will talk about their walk with Christ and take questions afterwards. These testimony nights are meant to unite parish communities together and help Catholics familiarize themselves with sharing their faith. We will have to find people with interesting stories.
- *At some point... Apologetics Master Class:* I would like to create a recorded “Apologetics Master Class” in the future as either training for apologetics leaders, material for apologetics groups in parishes, or even just for the general enjoyment of the Diocese.

Parishes: Rather than adding to a pastor's workload, my intention is to assist in his mission to feed and inspire Christ's flock with apologetics and sincere interactions.

- **Request a Speaker:** Parishes will be able to invite me using either a (work) phone call or online form to speak on an apologetics issue. I plan work closely with the St. Paul's guild, especially on their Apologia series. *Fr. Christopher Ford will provide me with a list of potential speakers so that other speakers can be invited to parishes.*
 - **Request a Series:** Parishes can also invite me to give a series of lectures on a certain topic in my areas of expertise: Catholic Moral Theology (Natural Law Theory), Scripture/Biblical Theology, the Case for the Papacy, etc.
- **Coffee & Donuts Apologetics Sundays:** The Apologetics program will provide coffee and donuts (and ideally other healthier options) after a Sunday Mass at any parish that is willing to host. During this hour, the apologetics opportunities in the Diocese will be shared, an apologetics reflection (~10 minutes), and an update on the world of online apologetics (e.g., new Catholic Answers articles and videos, promotion of LEAD, etc.).
- **Live Q&A Nights:** A panel of willing speakers – myself included – will address questions from the audience. I hope to have one Q&A night in each “hub” of the Diocese (Danbury, Bridgeport, and Stamford hubs).
- **Apologetics groups:** If there is a parishioner who is interested in starting an apologetics group in their parish and has the support of their clergy, then I will help guide and sustain that group without micromanaging it. I hope for these apologetics groups to read an apologetics book that I will select for the Diocese in preparation for a speaker, to have monthly lectures on the Faith, and to make the events in the previous three bullet points happen more frequently at their parishes. I will be actively encouraging the creation of these groups for anyone who is willing and able.

High School Students: My goal is to help them see that Catholicism is relevant to their lives and to demonstrate how to practice the faith in a way that is fulfilling and worthwhile.

- **Curriculum:** I am willing to advise on the apologetics curriculum, such as “learning targets.”
- **Presentations:** I am willing to speak at retreats and in Religion/Theology classrooms about apologetics, helping students become connected with resources in the Diocese and online.
- **Q&A Nights with Parents and Teachers:** These live Q&A nights will be specifically for Catholic parents and teachers, offering wine and cheese and other goods.
- **Speakers for High School Students:** Either in schools or parishes, there will be speakers specifically for high school students. These speakers will be selected for their appeal to younger audiences (and affordable).
- **Mentorship Program:** High school juniors and seniors (if they volunteer themselves and meet other criteria) and even college students and young professionals (under 30) who are practicing their faith will be invited to share their testimonies on how they practice,

modelling belief and practice to their younger peers. Students will be able to ask questions and interact with the speakers in a public and secure location.

- **“Theology Bowl” Competition:** In recent years, Catholic schools in Atlanta, Georgia and Arlington, Virginia have introduced “Theology/Religion Bowl” competitions. I believe this program would offer high school students a fun and engaging way to learn theology and apologetics, and it would be a community bonding exercise (e.g., high schoolers vs. seminarians, etc.). Religion/Theology teachers can form their own teams, coach them, and it would help keep everyone sharp on theology.
- *Apologetics Binders/Book for Seniors:* After introducing high school seniors to the binder (or book) and its contents, they will be able to carry it with them into college and life. I am willing to write or begin to write a book/textbook for the juniors and seniors.

Enactment

I think it is best to offer a broad rather than artificially precise plan.

1. **Setting the Stage:** An online apologetics page needs to be established with a calendar of events, “Request a Speaker” or “Request a Series” tab, “Schedule an Appointment”, and an “About Me” section. I will also need flyers and brochures that I can hand to people, especially priests. I will make an Instagram and Facebook page for the Office of Apologetics.
2. **Announcement:** In order to build excitement for apologetics in the Diocese, I think it would be best if Bishop Caggiano and I spoke in a brief video (less than three minutes) announcing that apologetics is coming to the Diocese, and I can announce what programs are being offered *once* they are finalized.
3. **Parish Connections:** The next step will be going to parishes, meeting pastors, and seeing which communities are interested in hosting apologetics events and how much they can commit. I would also like to meet with OCIA/Religious education directors and even introduce myself to OCIA classes. It might be good for me to briefly introduce myself in some post-mass announcements.
 - a. **The “Donut Sunday” Initiative:** One effective way to introduce myself to parishes is to use the “Donut Sundays” as that introduction. However, given the Stipend Schedule and related costs, we should carefully plan these events.
4. **High School Connections:** I will also need to introduce myself to principals, chaplains, and religion/theology teachers.
5. **Working with What we Have:** After seeing how parishes and schools respond, and the practical unfolding of the enactment plan, I will adjust accordingly. My goal is to find at least two parishes and two schools that are very enthusiastic about and receptive of apologetics.