

# Sacred Heart using video series to let parishioners think more deeply about their faith

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Parishioners at Sacred Heart Parish in Stamford have been keeping their faith alive during the pandemic by tuning in to “The Search,” a seven-part, video series centered around examining humankind’s place in the larger story of existence. Chris Stefanick, the moderator and voice of the series, will be featured live on the group’s Dec. 15 Zoom session as a guest speaker.

Aside from hosting “The Search,” Stefanick is the founder and president of Real Life Catholic, a non-profit organization/website which operates as the headquarters for his various initiatives. Stefanick also hosts live seminars, reaching more than 85,000 people per year, and has authored the “Chosen” Confirmation Program, which to date has formed more than 500,000 teens.

Bob **Melia**, longtime parishioner and member of Sacred Heart’s pastoral council, said in the spring the Evangelization Committee wanted to try to understand — with extensive research — why people continue to leave the Church. The goal was to bring back those people who left.

“Everyone sort of said to themselves, ‘I don’t have the understanding, the courage, or the confidence in my own faith to have that conversation,’ ” **Melia** said. “Let’s study all the issues to have more confidence in how to approach this.”

When traditional methods of evangelization were no longer possible seven months ago during the first wave of the pandemic, Father Michael Cambi initiated the idea to host Zoom meetings for parishioners to collectively view and discuss "The Search." Each episode of the series is streamed through formed.org, then the group holds a discussion, challenging each participant to think deeply about his or her faith and examine fundamental questions with others. In a world where the majority identify religiously as "none," the video series asks viewers to pause and examine what fulfillment really looks like.

"It sets it up by saying every culture, every generation throughout history — most people have the same goal — to find joy and happiness," **Melia** said. "After the video we discuss a series of questions: Think about a time when you were happy: How long did it last? What was it? Think of a time you had anxiety or grief: How did you deal with that?"

During their last meeting, after viewing the second episode of the series, much to the audience's surprise, former NBA player and coach Bill Hanzlik, the main subject of the episode, appeared on their screens as a guest speaker.

"We put a target out there where we would give \$1,000 to our food pantry if we got at least 75 people to come (and watch) and we got more than that; we had 90 people and counting," **Melia** said.

Hanzlik, who played college basketball at Notre Dame, spent 10 years as a player in the league and later became the coach of the Denver Nuggets. He was fired after one year, while posting an 11-71 record, the worst record for a rookie coach in NBA history.

During the group's discussion portion of the meeting, Hanzlik spoke about resorting to prayer during tough times, asking God for advice, and going from feeling utterly devastated to establishing the Gold Crown Foundation, a non-profit based in Colorado which offers youth sports and education programs to 15,000 children annually.

**Melia** has used a grassroots approach to spread the evangelization effort, inviting those who initially participated to invite their daughters, sons, brothers, sisters and anyone they know who might have "fallen away" from the Church.

"Sacred Heart is just this little church, in the middle of the northwestern part of the Catskills, our church has a lot of pride in what we're doing because it all started with folks from our parish that had courage in their faith to spread the joy they had with their own relationship with Christ," **Melia** said, "and that willingness, that risk, is what made it all go."

Like other parishes, Sacred Heart has sponsored formed.org, giving parishioners access to the streaming service used to view "The Search." If interested in participating in the next session featuring Stefanick, email **Melia** at [Robertmelia61@gmail.com](mailto:Robertmelia61@gmail.com)