

Why Family Catechesis is So Important Today

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“With the Christian family, parents are the primary educators in the faith and “the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.” But all the members make up the family, and each can make a unique contribution to creating the basic environment in which a sense of God’s loving presence is awakened and faith in Jesus Christ is confessed, encouraged, and lived.”

(National Directory for Catechesis)

Research: Five Factors (Christian Smith, Soul Searching)

- The evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.
- “We’ll get what we are.” Most parents most likely will end up getting religiously of their children what they themselves are
- The best way to get most youth involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith communities.”

The Effective Christian Education study found that families that express faith do the following things:

- talk about religious faith
- have family devotions, prayer, or Bible reading at home
- have family projects to help other people

Youth in families that often express faith does the following things twice as often as those families that do not express faith:

- read the Bible and prayer when alone
- read and study about the Christian faith
- are spiritually moved by the beauty of God’s creation
- have often felt God’s presence in their life

Research: Religious Upbringing Robert Wuthnow, *Growing Up Religious*

The prime source of faith for self-described “religious” people was the way faith permeated the daily life of their family. Time and again they pointed to variations on several common family activities. Religious formation happens when “specific, deliberate religious activities... are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines.” “Compared with these practices, the formal teachings of religious leaders often pale in significance. Yet when such practices are present, formal teachings also become more important.”

1. Eating: Family Meal—eating together, saying grace before meals, sharing information about our lives—is one of the most potent ways of forming faith.
2. Sleeping: Bedtime rituals and prayer
3. Having conversations: Talk of values, character, and holiness
4. Sacred objects/religious images

5. Celebrating the holidays
6. Moral instruction
7. Being part of a faith community
8. Family devotions and reading the Bible
9. Role of generations (grandparents)

“The daily round of family activities must somehow be brought into the presence of God. Parents praying, families eating together, conversations focusing on what is proper and improper, and sacred artifacts are all important ways in which family space is sacralized. They come together, forming an almost imperceptible mirage of experience.”

Research on Family Faith Davidollahite and Loren Marks

1. Turning to God for support, guidance, and strength
2. Sanctifying the family by living religion at home
3. Resolving conflict with prayer, repentance, and forgiveness
4. Overcoming challenges and trials through shared faith
5. Abstaining from proscribed activities and substances
6. Sacrificing time, money, comfort, and convenience
7. Serving others in the family & faith community
8. Nurturing spiritual growth through example, teaching, and discussion

Research: 5 Keys Youth and Family Institute

1. Caring Conversation. Christian values and faith are passed on to the next generation through supportive conversation. Listening and responding to the daily concerns of our children make it easier to have meaningful conversations regarding the love of God and are ways to express God’s love to others. Hearing their parents “faith stories” is one of the most important influences on the faith of children and teenagers.

2. Family Devotions and Prayer. The Christian faith shapes the whole of our lives and involves a lifetime of study, reflection, and prayer. Family devotions provide a way to learn more about the Bible and Christian tradition as a family and apply the teachings to daily life as a follower of Jesus Christ. This understanding of a devotional life includes, but is not limited to, public worship, bedtime prayers, Bible reading and study, table grace, evening, and morning prayers, and praying alone at any time of the day or night.

3. Family Rituals and Traditions. Families identify themselves and tell their family stories through daily routines, celebrations, and rituals. Family rituals can take many forms from daily rituals such as mealtime, bedtime, leaving and returning; celebrations such as birthdays, anniversaries, and special achievements; church year rituals at home such as Advent and Lent; milestones such as births and deaths, first day of school and graduations, etc. Family rituals and traditions speak volumes about what the family values, believes and promotes, and how much the family values its faith.

4. Family Service. Engaging in service with one’s family can be a powerful opportunity for growing in faith. Both children and adults are more likely to have a growing, strong faith when their family serves others together. There are many opportunities for service: some in the home, some in the congregation, some in the larger community. Whatever type of service you choose, it is best done with family members or other intergenerational groups.

5. Family Meals. So many of the family's faith practices happen around the family meal - having conversations, praying, reading the Bible, celebrating rituals and traditions, to name a few. The family meal is one of the few rituals that allow us to act out our concern for each other, our need and desire to be together. The family meal is the time when family comes first- establishing, enjoying, and maintaining ties. Just as a meal was central in the ministry of Jesus, the family meal can be a central faith experience for family members, and the family as whole. It is a daily opportunity to discover Jesus' presence in the midst of family life.

Benefits of Family Catechesis

1. Involves the whole family in congregational life and learning, building up the faith of the whole family.
2. Provides a way to teach, model, and demonstrate family faith practices.
3. Provides the resources for families to live Christian practices at home.
4. Eases the transfer of learning to the home because the whole family experiences the learning and practices together.
5. Builds up the confidence and ability of parents to share faith and values with their children by providing parent education, resources, support, and encouragement.

If we want children and teens to become lifelong Catholics and members of the church we have to start now by involving the whole family in the life of the church.

Integrating Faith & Daily Life "the daily activities of family life are the canvas for experiencing and sharing their faith life with one another, and that activities that call them as a family beyond their own boundaries are also significant" (Diana Garland)

Key Features of Intergenerational (IG) Learning

1. Inclusive of all ages and generations, single or married, with or without children.
2. Builds community and meaningful relationships across all the generations in a parish.
3. Provides a setting for each generation to share and learn from the other generations.
4. Involves the whole family in learning together and equips families with the knowledge, skills, and faith-sharing activities for nurturing faith at home.
5. Provides an environment where new ways of living one's faith can be practiced.
6. Provides adult role models for children/teens.
7. Promotes understanding of shared values and a common faith, as well as respect for individuals in all stages and ages of life.
8. Helps to overcome the age-segregated nature of our society and church programs.
9. Enhances people's identification with their church and integration within the community.
10. Incorporates a variety of ways to learn: prayer, community building, interactive and experiential presentations and activities, group discussion and sharing.

IG Learning Process

IGRE: two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/ living in faith through

- † in-common experiences
- † parallel learning
- † contributive-occasions
- † interactive sharing.

An ideal IGRE program will have all four patterns of relationships.

1. an all-ages learning experience for the whole assembly
2. age-appropriate in-depth learning experiences for families with children, adolescents, young adults, and adults
3. an all-ages contributive learning experience in which each generation teaches the other generations
4. reflection on the learning experience and interactive group sharing

Meal and Community Building (30 minutes)

Part 1. Gathering and Prayer (10-15)

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience (20-30)

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience (75-90)

Option 1. Whole Group

Option 2. Age Group

Option 3. Activity Center

Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application (15-20)

Part 5. Closing Prayer (5-10)

All Ages Methods

- table sharing
- dramatic presentation
- game or simulation
- video or media presentation
- art project
- storytelling
- participating in a ritual
- praying together
- quiz

Examples

† Holy Week: Quiz

† Death of the Messiah: Stations of the Cross

† Easter Season: Dramatizing Gospel Stories

† All Saints: Saints of Fortune Game

† Advent: Images of the Messiah in Word, Art, and Music

† Justice-Solidarity: A Global Banquet

In-Depth—Whole Group

Intergenerational learning activities and age-appropriate learning activities for families with children, teens, young adults, and adults at table groups.

Option 1. Entire session intergenerational

Option 2. Presentations to entire group with age-specific table group activities

Example: We Are Called to Pray

1. Gathering and Opening Prayer

2. All Ages Learning: I'm Ready God, Where Are You? (Drama)

3. In-Depth Learning: Paths of Prayer

- Activity 1: Creating a Space for Prayer
- Activity 2: Praying with Scripture
- Activity 3: Praying with the Psalms
- Activity 4: Intercessory Prayer
- Activity 5: The Jesus Prayer

4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application
5. Closing Prayer

In-Depth—Age Group

Parallel learning groups with age-appropriate learning plans for:

- young children (pre-school)
- families with children (grades 1-5)
- middle school youth
- high school youth
- young adults
- adults

Example: Identity of Christ

1. Gathering and Opening Prayer
2. All Ages Learning: Gospel Portraits of Jesus (multimedia experience)
3. Age-Appropriate Learning: Exploring the Gospel Portraits of Jesus Christ
 - Families with Children Learning Plan
 - Adolescent Learning Plan
 - Adult Learning Plan
4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application
5. Closing Prayer

In-Depth—Activity Center

Learning stations or centers with a variety of structured learning activities on a common theme

- † Age-specific
- † Intergenerational

Activity Center: Example

Theme: Jesus, Son of God

Methods

- † Dramatic presentations & role plays
- † Creative art activities
- † Storytelling & Scripture imagination activities
- † Media presentations
- † Music
- † Prayer and ritual
- † Group discussion & family conversations

Activity Centers

1. Jesus is Born (Infancy Narratives)
2. Jesus Is God 's Beloved Son (Baptism and Transfiguration)
3. Jesus Teaches Parables of the Kingdom of God
4. Jesus Heals People
5. Jesus Forgives Sin
6. Jesus Raises People from the Dead
7. Jesus Feeds People

From Content to Learning Format

† For content that is all-ages appropriate and requires a sequential presentation consider the whole group format.

† For content that requires age-appropriate concepts and methods consider the age group format.

† For content that can be designed into individual learning activities and does not require sequencing, consider learning activity centers.

Home Kit

Advent Season Home Kit

- **Prayer:** prayers for every day of Advent, table prayers for Advent and the Christmas Season, weekly prayers for the Advent wreath.
- **Rituals:** blessing before the Christmas meal and the Christ candle, a blessing for a Christmas crèche, a blessing for a Christmas tree, a blessing upon opening gift.
- **Learning:** Jesse Tree and/or an Advent wreath; day-by-day Advent calendar; family/teen/adult Advent reflections books; list of Advent-Christmas storybooks and DVDs, guide to the Advent-Christmas Lectionary.
- **Service:** Advent-Christmas service projects, alternative gift-giving suggestions, a list of organizations for making charitable donations
- **Family Enrichment:** recipes for family baking activities, ideas for making gifts, mealtime activities.

Lifelong Faith Formation
www.lifelongfaith.com