Involving Families in Religious Education

Today, religion teachers face several challenges with regard to engaging the family.

by Joseph D. White, Ph.D.

The family is central to our Catholic Faith. God reveals himself as a “family” -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- a communion of persons. God created us, male and female, in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27; CCC 2205). We are created to be in communion with one another. Jesus reveals God as a Father who loves and cares for his children. The Church is revealed to us as a family into which we are adopted by God and become brothers and sisters to one another (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus’ relationship with the Church is presented in Scripture as a marriage, with Jesus as the groom and the Church his Bride.

The family also has a privileged place in religious education. The Catechism states that “parents receive the responsibility of evangelizing their children” and calls them the “First heralds” of the faith (2225). The family is called “domestic church” -- the church of the home (CCC, 2224).

Today, religion teachers face several challenges with regard to engaging the family. These challenges include hectic schedules and divided attention. One study from the University of Michigan showed a shocking decrease in the amount of time devoted solely to family conversation, a 33% decrease in families eating dinner together, and a 28% drop in family vacations. In the same period, the time children spent in structured sports doubled, and passive spectator leisure time increased five-fold. More recently, a study by the Annenberg Center for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California showed that 28% of Americans say they are spending less time with their families than in the previous year and this rise appears to be related to more time on digital media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Internet websites.

Another challenge to engaging the family is the increasing secularization of modern society, which can lead to a compartmentalization of faith so that it is seen as a school subject or activity rather than a central aspect of one’s life that impacts all others. A third challenge is the fact that some adults are not yet well-formed in their faith, due to incomplete or inadequate catechesis. Consequently, these adults may lack the confidence and/or knowledge to guide their families in the faith. Finally, there exists a cultural fear of commitment, likely due to the busy-ness of modern life – a struggle with taking on additional responsibilities.