

ALIVE IN CHRIST

Leader's Guide for Implementing *Alive in Christ* Family + Faith Gathered Sessions

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Family + Faith Sessions Overview



Alive in Christ provides Leader's Guides for ten new Family + Faith Sessions per year:

- **Seven Thematic Sessions (by unit)**

- Revelation
- Trinity
- Jesus Christ
- The Church
- Morality
- Sacraments
- Kingdom of God

- **Two Seasonal Sessions**

- 2013–14: Advent and Lent
- 2014–15: All Saints/All Souls and Triduum

- **One Catholic Social Teaching**

- 2013–14: Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- 2014–15: Call to Family, Community, and Participation

Objectives: OSV supports parishes and families by providing *Alive in Christ* Family + Faith Sessions designed to

- provide systematic and intentional faith formation that includes communal and age-specific catechesis organized around seven essential truths of the faith and Church teaching, seasonal and liturgical celebrations, and Catholic Social Teachings.
- evangelize and catechize parents in response to the call of the new evangelization.
- form parents in the three-step catechetical process so that they become familiar with its purpose and rhythm: Invite—Discover—Live.
- raise parents' consciousness of their family as the domestic Church, and encourage and assist them in their role as the first and best teachers of their children in the faith by providing them with tools and skills to grow in their confidence and ability to share and connect to faith in natural ways during everyday experiences.
- Facilitate family conversations on intentional ways they can live out what they have learned as they are sent forth at the conclusion of each session.

Section 1

Foundation for Family + Faith Sessions

Recent studies on religion point to the **importance of parents in the spiritual formation of their children.**

Parental involvement in a child's faith formation increases not only a child's identification with their faith as they grow, but their commitment to the faith, and their practice of that faith as they reach adulthood.

The Catholic Church affirms the primary role of parents in forming their children in the Catholic faith. In many documents, the leaders of our Church have emphasized this importance. *Familiaris Consortio* states, "The ministry of evangelization carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable. It assumes the characteristics typical of family life itself, which should be interwoven with love, simplicity, practicality and daily witness"¹ (53). (See Section 10 of this Leader's Guide.)

In *Follow the Way of Love*, our bishops (USCCB) assert, "A family is our first community and the most basic way in which the Lord gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world. The early Church expressed this truth by calling the Christian family *a domestic church or church of the home.*" They further testify that, "The profound and the ordinary moments of daily life—mealtimes, workdays, vacations, expressions of love and intimacy, household chores, caring for a sick child or elderly parent, and even conflicts over things like how to celebrate holidays, discipline children, or spend money—all are the threads from which you can weave a pattern of holiness."

The Family Faith Formation Approach

In the family faith formation approach, we support the domestic Church by coming alongside families and journeying with them. It is important that lessons focus on **a lived faith**, on expressions of faith that affirm the Church's teachings in everyday living. We help parents to more intentionally teach the faith by identifying the faith lessons in the everyday moments when we teach our children to love, to respect, to forgive, to care for creation, and to care for each other. Family faith formation should be practical in its catechizing and evangelizing methods and efforts.

Family faith formation opportunities take place in **intergenerational gathered settings** as well as **age-appropriate learning sessions.** In this manner, catechetical leaders can coach parents in forming their children in the faith. A description of the Family + Faith Sessions and its components are included in this Leader's Guide. Details and adaptations are included as well.

During **thematic unit lessons**, family members will be learning about the same topics at age appropriate levels. Older children can go deeper. Parents can learn how to identify moments in their everyday lives to continue to explore these topics at home. Parents will also have an opportunity to build fellowship with other parents, building relationships with the parish family. Catechetical leaders should use this time to inform parents of, and lead parents to, parish events that will help the family explore these topics in the **life of the parish** as well.

The *Alive in Christ* Family + Faith Sessions offer parents and children a **shared experience** and **shared language.** This common experience encourages parents to affirm the lessons children learn with their catechists, and encourages children to ask questions of their parents, who have explored the same theme and topics. This

raises the child's comprehension of the lesson, and increases the parent's confidence in teaching the faith. Parents are also empowered as they share their faith and experience with other parents. Community is created as parents gather and share, and as they realize they are not alone on this journey. They are not the only one that isn't living the faith perfectly; they are not the only one struggling to teach their child about prayer; they are not the only one struggling to find words to describe how God works in our lives.

Parents will serve as **companions and mentors** to each other. We are not meant to make this faith journey alone. Jesus sent the disciples out two-by-two. Community has always been an important part of the Church. Our faith is not meant to be a personal, private affair. Family faith formation encourages this type of community building.

We are called to **share our stories of faith, to build others up, and to give hope**. But when we share our stories of doubt, we are sharing faith as well. When we share the stories of where we went wrong, we are sharing stories that tell others how to get it right. When we share our stories, we make connections. **We were created for connections**. Those connections are how we create communities. Family faith formation builds a community where those connections are possible.

In *Forming Intentional Disciples*, author Sherry Weddell says that most Catholics do not know how to share faith stories, let alone stories of doubt. Too many people feel they do not have a story to share. Their faith is not great. Their story is not great. They are not holy enough. But Scripture tells us that **God chose ordinary people** and showed them that his power enables them to do extraordinary things. As we share the People of Faith stories and encourage parents to share their own stories, we empower families to look for God's work in their own lives.

A Note about the Vision of Family Faith Formation

This guide does not share every reason and support for implementing a family faith formation approach. There are books that share this in much greater detail. Instead, this guide assumes you have already researched this approach and are considering how you will implement such an approach.

Although the vision and research is not given here in detail, it is important that you have studied related materials (books, articles, and statistics on the purpose and vision of this approach) and have created a vision and mission for your own parish faith formation program. This vision should be shared with leadership, pastoral and education boards, and staff and volunteers before presenting it to the parish at large. Leadership must support such an approach in order for there to be success in implementation. It is important that you do your homework, lay the foundation, and build the vision, the design, and the plan before jumping into any new approach.

Words Matter

When we present anything new, it is important to remember that language matters. Your words should be positive and should offer hope and support. It is not helpful to tell parents that because the Church teaches that parents are the primary educators in the faith of their children, they alone are responsible for this task. It is not helpful to tell parents that if they are not devoted to living out their Catholic faith, then there is no point in having their children participate in a catechetical program. There are many ways that we can state our case that will put parents on the defensive. Avoid these mistakes at all costs. Instead, invite and affirm. Affirm parents in what they are already doing that teaches the faith, that teaches right from wrong, and that shows their children how to care for others. Affirm the gifts

that they have. Challenge them to teach the faith more intentionally and assure them that the parish is going to journey alongside them in this effort.

Welcome Matters

As the *Family + Faith Parent Orientation* section outlines, hospitality cannot be overemphasized. It is critical that parents, grandparents, stepparents, family faith partners, and—in fact—all members of all families feel welcome. (See Section 3 of this Leader's Guide.)

Assessment

Assess your parish's needs and your parish's gifts. There are a number of ways to implement a family faith formation approach, and your leadership team must decide what is the best approach for your parish, taking into consideration your numbers, your space, your schedule, and your resources. What ministries are active in your parish? What faith practices happen in your community? What community events encourage parishioners to live the Gospel? Part of a great family faith formation program is what happens outside of the gathered sessions—the lived faith in action in the community and in the life of the parish.

Life of the parish events might include opportunities for communal and personal prayer, such as Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Rosary for Life, Stations of the Cross, Liturgy of the Hours in community, and retreats. Events might also include Christian living practices such as a parish day at the local shelter or soup kitchen, mission trips, and various local service opportunities. Parish missions, parish picnics, and other social events also build up the life of a parish. What kind of events might work well at your parish?

Methods of Implementation and Adaptations

One method that supports both the developmentally appropriate, age-specific, and intergenerational learning settings is the Family + Faith Session as it is proposed in the *Alive in Christ* Thematic Unit Leader Guides. Parents gather once a month in a large group setting, while children learn in an age-specific classroom setting. After the prescribed time, children and parents come together to share what they learned. Facilitated conversation leads to an exchange of how the lesson applies to their life today, and families are challenged to go out and live their faith.

In the classroom setting, children are presented with the first chapter lessons of a thematic unit. Parents receive an introduction to the unit. Children continue to meet with their catechists weekly to learn about the lessons presented in the next two chapters of the unit.

Some parishes will choose to adapt the gathered lessons to fit their parish's needs. This may include parents and children learning together throughout the entire session at every unit gathering or it may include coaching parents while children remain in the classroom, entrusting parents to do the child/parent work at home. Family + Faith Sessions offer a Living Your Faith: Option 2 for this adaptation. Parents and children only come together for the closing prayer/ritual in this option.

Some parishes might only gather for an intergenerational session a few times a year, rather than monthly. Such a parish might choose the Seasonal and Catholic Social Teaching lessons for three scripted events.

Other parishes may have time or space constraints and will use this family faith approach as their monthly gathering, and then parents will teach their children at home throughout the rest of the month. Our Sunday Visitor offers parents *Alive in Christ* Home Lessons on the student and family section of the website (www.aliveinchrist.osv.com) to further support this approach.

Be intentional about any adaptations you make. If you choose to gather the children and parents together at the beginning of the session, as opposed to the end, know why you are making that adaptation, and make sure your reasons fit your vision and mission.

Overview of the Family + Faith Learning Sessions

After parents drop children off in their respective classrooms, they meet in the assigned large group gathering area for the adult learning session. Catechists will bring children to the large group gathering at the assigned time for the family learning component.

1. Learning Sessions—Age-Specific Component
2. Transition—Children are brought to gathering area for closing session
3. Living and Learning Together
4. Take Home Component/Lived Faith Component

Each session forms children and parents through a three-step catechetical process: Invite—Discover—Live.

During the Invite, children and parents encounter God in his Word. (The prayer space is important. See Section 4 of this Leader's Guide.) During each Invite, the children read the Scripture verse at the beginning of their respective age-specific lessons. The parents read a scripture verse that ties to the theme for the unit. All participants enter into a modified practice of *Lectio Divina*. (See Section 5 of this Leader's Guide.)

After small group and large group discussions of the Scripture verse (see Section 6 of this Leader's Guide), catechists and catechetical leaders present the material for the unit in Catholics Believe. After parents receive a basic lesson on the theme (see Section 7 of this Leader's Guide), there are also discussions of how that theme applies to their daily life and how they might support their children in learning about the faith.

A Person of Faith from this lesson gives witness to the Catholic faith; then children are brought to the large group area for the intergenerational component.

Transitions are very important for children, and also for their parents. (See Section 8 of this Leader's Guide for suggestions on safe and secure transitions.)

If parishes follow Option 1 for the gathered component of the Family + Faith Session, this **Living Our Faith** lesson will allow parents and children to share what they have learned during the session. Catechetical leaders then challenge parents and children to live the faith throughout the month and send them forth with a closing prayer ritual.

The challenge should be included in the take-home Parent Pages component. The Parent Pages will offer ideas on how the family can continue their learning and practice at home. A template is provided for each unit's Parent Pages so that parishes can personalize this information and include Life of the Parish events that parents can attend with their children to further their practice and learning of the Catholic faith.

Section 2

Family + Faith Parent Orientation

This is a 50-minute “getting to know you” session to be inserted into your opening parent session. If you do not have a year opening session, insert parts of this session into the Unit 1 Family + Faith Session.

This Parent Orientation should be given in a session especially for adults. The orientation shares the vision of the Family + Faith Sessions while showing support for parents in their primary vocation as parents.

The Parent Orientation should not be presented as a parent “meeting.” Too often we hold “meetings” where we talk “at” parents. We tell them what is expected, what is mandatory, what they have to turn in, what their kids have to wear, and so on. Although this information is important and necessary, parents can read handbooks. Point them to the information, while offering them a session that changes how they experience faith formation. Engage parents! This could be called a Parent Orientation, a Parent Workshop, or a Parent Support Session—come up with a creative title, while also billing it as a major component of the faith formation program. Tell parents, “It is our expectation that you will attend this workshop, which benefits the entire family. We hope to see you at (insert name/time/place info).”

Your Parent Orientation should include important beginning of the year information and an opportunity to meet and get to know each other. Include this orientation session as part of your opening session for parents. Engage parents, and offer them parenting support through these Family + Faith Sessions.

This session assumes you have previously shared the vision of family faith formation—the “why” of your change of faith formation methods—especially if this is a new model for your parish. (See Sections 9 and 10 of this Leader’s Guide for support regarding this vision of

faith formation, Church documents, Scripture, and other resources.) This is not meant to be an introduction to a new method of faith formation; this session is a kick-off of the new program, an introduction to the families that will journey together, and a glimpse into why such support is beneficial to parents and our families.

Links/Media Recommendations

Used/Recommended in Session during Welcome Parents

Parenting Manifesto (2:27 minutes)

<http://aol.it/1AdeQCN>

Used/Recommended in Session during Discussion Time

Saint Joseph: A Hidden Life from “Who Cares about the Saints?” with Father James Martin, S.J., Loyola Productions, Inc. (7:09 minutes)

<http://youtu.be/Gm1rUs39XWY>

Alternative Videos

Below are alternative videos to use in this session. Adapt script to refer to the video of your choice.

Mary from “Who Cares about the Saints?” with Father James Martin, S.J., Loyola Productions, Inc. (9:58 minutes)

<http://youtu.be/LJgiK9PTtwg>

Swagger Wagon Advertisement for Toyota (2:35 minutes)

<http://youtu.be/qI-N3F1FhW4>

Use the Leader Guide, which begins on the following page, to host an Alive in Christ Family + Faith Session Parent Orientation.

Objectives: This session will

- engage, empower, and encourage parents.
- share the vision and the benefits of journeying together in a family program.
- support parents in their primary vocation in the family.
- create community among the parents of the children in your program.

ALIVE IN CHRIST Family+Faith Session Parent Orientation

Leader Guide/Script & Instructions for Parent Orientation

 Total 50 minutes



Leader Note

Each parish has its own personality. The size of your group and the setting, time, and day of your orientation should all be taken into account as you address the welcoming of your families. Know your community's needs.



Quick Tip

There are a number of video clips a leader could choose for each gathered session. Know your faith community. Watch the video clips to determine if the content and emotion are appropriate for your community.

 About 40 minutes



Quick Tip

Display these questions on a screen as part of a PowerPoint® presentation.

Welcome Parents

When we feel welcomed, we feel like we belong. The feeling of belonging leads to engagement and community. Provide refreshments, such as coffee and cookies, or juice and fruit. (See Section 3 of this Leader's Guide.) Hospitality is of the utmost importance when bringing families together for family faith formation. It cannot be overemphasized. If possible, seat parents at tables to encourage eye contact and conversation among participants.

Personalize the welcome, and be sure to thank the parents for coming. Pass out any appropriate materials, handbooks, texts, etc. while the parents settle in.

Say these (or similar) words: *First, please know that we feel privileged to join you and your families on your faith journey. You are the most important influence in the faith life of your children. We intend merely to assist you in this mission; to offer ideas, resources, and experiences that will empower you to be intentional about this mission.*

Family faith formation offers parents a chance to journey with and be supported by other parents. It gives families a shared faith language and shared faith experiences, as we focus on the same doctrinal themes as our children. It also gives children the opportunity to see us "being Church" together.

We know that all parents want what is best for their children and work hard to be positive role models.



Play video clip—Parenting Manifesto (watch the first 2:27 minutes). (See Links/Media Recommendations on page 7.)

Discussion Time

Say: *Take the next few minutes to discuss your answers to the following questions:*

- How many children do you have? What are the ages of your children?
- In what ways are you able to have a positive influence on your children? What values do you promote through your words and actions?
- What valuable lessons have your children learned from you? What important lessons do you think they still need to learn?
- What advice did your parents give you regarding child-rearing that you have totally ignored? What advice from your parents are you grateful for?

Section 2 (continued)

Say these (or similar) words: Take a moment to reflect. Think about the valuable learning experiences you have shared with your children. How have your children grown from these experiences?

Being a parent is one of life's most rewarding experiences. It is also one of life's greatest challenges. Where before we might have felt invincible, now we feel small, helpless in some ways, desperately wanting to keep the world from hurting this precious child we love so much. We are filled with hopes and dreams, but also anxieties and fears, for our children.

Every family is a community. The family is where we first learn of the love of God. The family has a unique ministry. The family is sacred. The family is holy. It may not be perfect, but it is holy. The Holy Family gives us a witness in Scripture as to this first community of love.

The Holy Family models faithful family life for us. Joseph was steadfast in his care for Mary and their son, his foster son. Both parents believed the messages they received from angels. Both responded obediently and faithfully. They raised Jesus in the Jewish faith, even traveling to Jerusalem for Passover. Yes, the Holy Family is held up as the model family, and often we focus on the perfection we see, but we have to remember they were not without their own family struggles. Though Mary was conceived without Original Sin, and Jesus was certainly perfect, we are still taught a few stories from their early life together that remind us that all was not perfect all of the time.

We have a teenage mom, a foster father, a journey to another country before the child is even born, and a birth in the countryside. And a few years later, they lose the child while on holiday; they don't even discover he's missing for a whole day! This probably was not their proudest moment as parents.

Tell a personal story about how you relate to the Holy Family, how the Holy Family gives you hope, or how they give an example you want to follow. For example, see the story shared in one parish:

"Every year as I read the account in Luke of Mary and Joseph leaving Jesus in Jerusalem, not even realizing he's not with them, I think of my husband leaving our daughter at our Catholic school's away basketball game. My husband walked in the door that night, laughed a little, and said 'I have a funny story to tell you,' knowing full well I would fail to see the humor. The Catholic school families always caravanned to basketball games because there are no buses to take the kids to away games. There were lots of kids piling into vans and cars; sometimes our son and his friends would be in our car, and our daughter and the girls in another, or vice versa, or a mix.

I had always warned my husband to be aware of who he had in his car, fearful he might leave someone else's child behind, never imagining I had to remind him to be aware of our own children. He was a couple of miles down the road when his cell phone rang. Our daughter was calling from another parent's cell phone. He actually thought she was in the van, and was confused as to why he was hearing her on the phone. She was going to get in the van she said, but someone asked her a question, and she was talking to this friend in the parking lot when she saw her father leave. She thought he was just joking, that he was impatient to get going and wanted to catch her attention ... but he didn't come back! The parent with the cell phone assured my husband that they would get my daughter home. Everyone had a good laugh, including me ... eventually.

Leader Note

Consider inviting a parent to share with the group their own personal story about how they relate to the Holy Family.

I couldn't imagine how he could do this. So I can only imagine the conversation Mary and Joseph had. 'I thought you checked.' 'You said we were ready to go!' 'You didn't even look to make sure our son was with us! You told me you had him.' Can you imagine the tension? You know there were words exchanged. They were holy, but they were human. They experienced the emotions we experience. When we hold them up as perfect, we might have a difficult time relating to them. If we enter into Scripture and consider reality, the Word can speak to us in a whole new way."

Say these (or similar) words (personalize according to the story shared above):

Catholic families are not perfect. They come in all shapes and sizes, sometimes with pregnant teenagers, stepdads, stepmoms, a parent who is Catholic, a parent who's not Catholic, single moms, single dads, a mix of grandparents raising grandchildren—the possibilities are endless. No matter what your family looks like, it's still holy. We live real, imperfect lives, but we can find God there. In fact, we first learn holiness in our families.

Father James Martin, S.J. wrote a book called Who Cares about the Saints. In it, he tells about how the Saints have given him witness to the faith. Here's what he has to say about Saint Joseph's role in the Holy Family.



Leader Note

If time allows, play the "Who Cares about the Saints?" video on Mary in addition to the video on Saint Joseph: <http://youtu.be/LJgiK9PTtwg>



Play video clip—Who Cares about the Saints? Saint Joseph (7:09 minutes). (See Links/Media Recommendations on page 7.)

Say these (or similar) words: *Jesus' parents had a great influence on the person he became. As Father Martin points out, Saint Joseph probably taught Jesus about God, his Father. He taught Jesus about his Jewish faith. Did his parents fully know how Jesus would change the world? We can't be sure, but most theologians and scholars believe they didn't fully understand. They had hopes and dreams for this baby, for this son they raised. If they did understand, they were probably afraid for their son. They probably realized when they lost him at the Temple that they had very little control over his life.*

Father Martin points out that most of what Saint Joseph did is unknown. Much of what we do as parents is also unknown, including our hopes, our dreams, and our fears. These are the things we can turn over to God in prayer, but we don't have to be alone on the journey. We have more in common with each other than we often realize.

Think about your hopes and dreams for your children. Think about your fears. Think about the times you feel you have little control over their lives.

Say: *Take the next few minutes to discuss with your group your answers to the following questions:*

- What do you fear for your child? What do you fear when it comes to parenting?
- When do you most feel a lack of control over their lives?
- What do you most want for your child?
- What do you hope for their future?
- What do you hope is important to them?
- What piece of advice or parenting influence do you most hope they take to heart?



Quick Tip

Display these questions on a screen as part of a PowerPoint® presentation.



Quick Tip

If people don't initially share, it is good to name words or phrases you heard as you walked around during small group discussions. Use this type of prompting to lead parents to share.



Leader Note

Listening allows you to create a more powerful experience for parents. Throughout the year, give parents an opportunity to speak to you at listening sessions, or after programs in a casual setting. The more they can share their own experiences, the more you can personalize the program to reach parents and meet their needs.

Give parents a 2-minute warning before their discussion time is up, and remind them that everyone should have had a chance to share. Unpack the discussion for a minute or two. What themes seem to ring true for many parents?

Say these (or similar) words: *It is important to remember that we are not alone on this journey. We are a community and a faith family. We support each other in the task of raising children in this world today. We want you to remember that we can always talk to each other and support one another!*

Parenting is tough business. I don't know how we could do it without faith, without support, or without each other. Thankfully, we don't have to. Our family sessions are designed to give you the support of your parish family and the support of other parents in your community.

Ask parents to share, with the larger group, something they heard today that they will take with them.



Close in prayer and tell parents you will be around after the closing of this orientation session. Offer parents the opportunity to stick around for more hospitality and a question and answer session.

Suggestions Regarding Hospitality

One of the most important things to consider while implementing family faith formation is the importance of hospitality. The word has lost some of its meaning in recent years. We tend to think of an industry of restaurants, hotels, and travelers too, but real hospitality is at the core of Christianity.

“Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.”

Hebrews 13:2

“Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining.”

1 Peter 4:8–9

“Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

Romans 15:7

We are called to welcome all. Too often we think that simply means saying “hello.” But real welcome makes a person feel as if they belong. **Real hospitality** encourages one to feel as if they are home and their needs are taken care of.

We learn through “listening sessions” (see page 14) that when people feel like “outsiders,” they hesitate to return. When people feel like they are required to come to a family session, where they are made to feel as if they are not part of the “club,” they resent attending the event at all.

So what do catechetical leaders do? We naturally know some of our families more than others. Some families feel more like a part of the community because they participate more. So what can we do as catechetical leaders to make all feel welcomed?

Well, the first step is being aware that we need to be vigilant about creating an environment of hospitality.

Greet everyone. Enlist those families who are more engaged in the community as greeters. Ask them to mingle as people arrive, to get to know “newer” families. But beyond that, we need to keep in mind that people come to us at all levels of faith, and we need to welcome them where they are.

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus greets two of the disciples, Andrew and Phillip, and invites them in. The greeting and invitation are unique. “What are you looking for?” Jesus asks the disciples. I don’t think they’re quite sure how to respond. Maybe they’re not even sure of what they’re looking for. They ask him, “Rabbi (teacher), where are you staying?” He says, “Come and see,” and invites them to stay awhile. They stay the day. I picture them eating and drinking, and passing the day away with conversation. Whatever it is they do, the disciples go tell the others, and Jesus invites them to follow him. They do. Jesus must have been so present to their needs. They were welcomed, they were made to feel as if they belonged, so much so that they wanted others to join them!

What if we greeted our faith formation families by asking them what they’re looking for? And what if we **responded to their needs** to such a degree that they invited others to join them? We need policies, plans, and good catechesis, of course, but we also need to meet people where they are.

Section 3 (continued)

The keys to this are listening, practicing presence, and attending to the person. This includes welcome, but it is more; it means inviting them in and offering them food and drink and a place to engage in fellowship with others. To be really present to people, we need to hear their stories. They need to know that we hear their stories. Our goal should be to accompany them as we invite them to “come and see.” Our goal should be to create spaces where people can feel welcomed and able to share their story, to embark on a journey of discovery with a friend, or their family, or with us.

All too often we tell people what they need to do to become parishioners, to enroll in our faith formation programs, or to receive the Sacraments. We tell them where they need to be and when they need to be there. We seldom slow down long enough to ask what they’re looking for, or to hear where they’ve been, what kept them away, what brings them home, or if they’re here for the first time. They may not even know how to respond to our question at the start. “What are you looking for?” They may not be able to put it into words in the beginning, but what if that was okay, and we didn’t push. What if we let them discover it as it unfolds, as Jesus did with the disciples.

We need to consider how we can make this an easier transition for families. Family faith formation is new for some parishes. There may be resistance in the beginning, but if all are welcomed and made to feel that this is “home,” and if they are given an opportunity to **experience real fellowship**, even the most resistant parents may become advocates for your program.

Jesus knew the importance of fellowship, and especially table fellowship. Throughout Scripture he eats and drinks with his friends. **Food encourages conversation.** It doesn’t have to be a meal. Think about how great it is when someone offers you a cool drink of water when it’s hot, or a piece of dark chocolate when you need a little treat.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me...”

Matthew 25:35

If your Family + Faith Sessions are in the morning, offer coffee and pastries, or fruit and granola; whatever seems to fit the personality and needs of your parish. You can also mix it up; one month offer mini-bagels and fruit, the next offer coffee cake and doughnuts. (Note: There are all kinds of tricks you can use to do this inexpensively. Don’t set up food at every table. Offer food buffet style. Those that want it will get up to grab something. Mini-bagels come in bags of 60; cut in half they become bagel servings for 120.)

If your Family + Faith Sessions are in the evening, you could offer pretzels, chips, and punch or cookies and coffee. Don’t purchase snacks in individual packs if money is an issue. Purchase large containers (bags) of pretzels and chips, but provide small paper cups or bowls for serving. Provide a ladle or small cup to scoop.

Do not let cost be an excuse not to offer snacks. It seems like a small thing, easy to drop if it’s not in the current budget. Don’t drop it; put it in the budget. Snacks and beverages put people at ease, and make them feel more comfortable. You want this.

If you follow the Family + Faith Sessions as prescribed in Option 1, you might want to put the snacks out as parents are engaging in *lectio divina*. That way, they begin the prayer without getting up to get refreshments, but the snacks are there when they finish, so they can continue the conversation and mingle with their group over food. Depending on the size of your program, you may need to engage volunteers to help set up the hospitality tables, otherwise all food and beverages will need to be prepared and staged before the session begins.

Listening Sessions

Listening sessions are a great practice of hospitality and they will make your program better. It is a great way to find out what your participants want. What resonates with them? What are they looking for? What seems inauthentic to them? What do they wish we had more of? What would they add to the program? What do they want us to drop? What faith questions do they want answered? What do they have to offer to others?

Invite a few people in each semester and talk over coffee and cookies. Don't make it a large group conference type of setting; make it an intimate conversation with a few people about the heart of your program. Do not only invite your "cheerleaders," those who love you and your program, although it's beneficial to have one of them in the group; be sure to invite a couple of people who will be brutally honest with you.

Then listen. Put aside the personal response and just hear what people say. Commit to integrating what you hear with the vision you have for your parish. What will help you reach others? What will make your program better? Be encouraged. If you get a few people to share what they think and what they want, it means that they care. If they are allowed to have some ownership, if their suggestions help the program evolve, then more families will feel as if this is their program, their home. Invite others to share through their response to reflection questions at the end of the year. Propose questions in such a way that you will get responses that could help "fine tune" your approach. As faith formation practitioners, we are called to accompany people, to continue with them on their journey. If we do this well, we allow them to accompany us.

For Further Study

Books

Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus by Sherry A. Weddell; Our Sunday Visitor, 2012.

Lectio Divina Bible Study: Learning to Pray in Scripture by Stephen J. Binz; Our Sunday Visitor, 2011.

Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as Christian Tradition by Christine Pohl and Pamela Buck; Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.

Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love by Lonni Collins Pratt and Father Daniel Hohman, OSB; Paraclete Press, 2011 (expanded edition).

Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction by David G. Benner; Intervarsity Books, 2002.

Websites

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/09/survey-one-in-five-americans-is-religiously-unaffiliated/>

<http://spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/practices.php?id=13>

<http://www.practicingourfaith.org/hospitality>

Suggestions for Prayer Space and Habits

We know prayer is important, but sometimes in our planning of events, prayer becomes an afterthought. Don't let that happen at your Family + Faith Sessions. Set up a sacred prayer space and encourage families to create their own at home. (See notes from the Year One Unit 1: Revelation Family + Faith Session for home prayer space suggestions.)

For a gathered event, the prayer space should be large enough that it doesn't feel like an afterthought. Place a table at the front of the room; drape fabric (when appropriate, keep with the colors of the liturgical cycle) across the table. Put a Bible or the Lectionary on a bookstand in a place of prominence. Adorn the table with candles, and a cross or crucifix. Few other items are necessary, though the season or the theme may lend itself to the placement of one or two other items, like the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* when we cover the unit on the Church, or a cluster of grapes or loaf of bread when we cover the unit on the Sacraments. Keep it simple and elegant.

When you read the Scripture verse for the opening of the Family + Faith Session, proclaim the Word of God from the prayer space. Light a candle, or use a realistic-looking LED candle. When Scripture is the focus of your session, it would be appropriate to lift high the Bible and process with it from one part of the space to another, allowing others to venerate God's Word. Teach families what it means to venerate and why we venerate the Bible.

In order to keep prayer at the center of what you do in these sessions, you must keep it at the center of your own life. Sometimes, as faith practitioners, we have so many "near experiences" of prayer, retreat, and reflection that we forget to enter into them personally. We prepare, study, and work on prayer experiences for

others, but we also need to tend to our own spirituality in order for prayer to feel authentic in all that we do.

When we take time to pray and when we take time for solitude, for Jesus, for the Holy Spirit, and for the Word to speak to us in *lectio divina*, this feeds our souls. Practicing self-care is incredibly important if we are to be well enough to accompany others on their journey. Jesus reminds us of this often. He goes off to the desert to pray alone. He asks friends to join him as he prays. Sometimes we need solitude and other times we need spiritual companions to accompany us. These companions can take the form of a spiritual director, spiritual friendships, or a good spiritual book. We need to create our own rhythms of work, rest, solitude and recreation. Only then can we truly tend to the spiritual life of others.

For Further Study

Books

Lectio Divina Bible Study: Learning to Pray in Scripture by Stephen J. Binz; Our Sunday Visitor, 2011.

Prayer by Pope Benedict XVI; Our Sunday Visitor, 2013.

Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction by David G. Benner; Intervarsity Books, 2002.

Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit by Henri Nouwen; Harper Collins, 2010.

Websites

Online prayer/retreat sites:

<http://lifelongcatechesis.osv.com>

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>

<http://www.sacredspace.ie>

<http://www.pray-as-you-go.org>

Suggestions for Prayer in Lectio Divina Style

Each *Alive In Christ* child session and each Family + Faith Session opens with Scripture and a modified form of *Lectio Divina*.

Lectio Divina is an ancient monastic approach to prayer. In his book, *Opening to God*, David Benner describes *Lectio Divina* in just those words: “a way of opening ourselves to God so we might be touched, awakened, realigned, integrated and healed.”

Practice the Ancient Prayer Form of Lectio Divina

Saint John Chrysostom, (a.d. 347-407) said, “To get the full flavor of an herb, it must be pressed between the fingers, so it is the same with the Scriptures; the more familiar they become, the more they reveal their hidden treasures and yield their indescribable riches.”

We are blessed to have a Church that guides us with centuries of interpretation, but our Church Fathers and our Popes tell us that we are called to enter into this dialogue.

Pope Saint John Paul II said, “It is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical texts the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39).

Pope Benedict XVI said, “I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina* . . . If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church—I am convinced of it—a new spiritual springtime” (*The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 38). In a 2005 speech, Pope

Benedict XVI said: “The diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart.”²

In this practice, the prayer follows these steps:

- **Lectio:** is a sacred reading, quite literally it means Divine Reading. One reads a Scripture passage slowly and attentively and tunes in to hear a word or phrase that captures the attention.

- **Meditatio:** think about it, ponder it, memorize it, gently repeat it, and allow the words to interact with your thoughts, hopes, memories, and desires. Through *meditatio*, God’s Word becomes his Word for participants—a word that touches the reader/listener at the deepest level.

- **Oratio:** dialogue with God; allow the Word you’ve taken in to touch your heart.

- **Contemplatio:** practice silence, enjoy the experience of simply being in the presence of God.

Offer tips for parents to practice this ancient prayer form at home:

- Practice this on your own and in groups.
- Read the upcoming Sunday readings with your children. (You can find them here: <http://uscgb.org/bible/>.)
- Ask your children what they think it means.
- Discuss what word or phrase stands out to you.
- Tell your children what you think God is saying to you.
- Visit Our Sunday Visitor’s website and use the Question of the Week for reflection: <http://lifelongcatechesis.osv.com>.

Section 5 (continued)

For Further Study

Books

Conversing with God in Scripture: A Contemporary Approach to Lectio Divina by Stephen J. Binz; The Word Among Us Press, 2008.

Lectio Divina Bible Study: The Mass in Scripture (Lectio Divina Bible Studies) by Stephen J. Binz; Our Sunday Visitor, 2011.

Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures by M. Basil Pennington; Crossroad Publishing, 1998.

Lectio Divina—The Sacred Art: Transforming Words and Images into Heart-centered Prayer (Art of Spiritual Living) by Christine Valters Painter; Skylight Paths Publishing, 2011.

Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer by David, G. Benner; IVP Books, 2010.

Websites

OSV article on *Lectio Divina*, by Lorene Hanley Duquin
<https://www.osvparish.com/ResourceLibrary/Prayer/Article/TabId/1550/ArtMID/16566/ArticleID/311/The-Word-of-God-in-the-Life-of-Everyone.aspx>

Order of Carmelites—What Is *Lectio Divina*?
<http://ocarm.org/en/content/lectio/what-lectio-divina>

Roman Catholic Spiritual Direction—*Lectio Divina*
<http://rcspiritualdirection.com/blog/2012/04/21/what-is-lectio-divina-and-will-it-help-my-prayer-life-a-guide-to-lectio-divina>

Father James Martin, S.J. on *Lectio Divina*
<http://youtu.be/2DxaGZqprrs>

See the following page for an introduction to the Encountering God in His Word section of the Family + Faith Sessions.



About 10 minutes

Introduction to Encountering God in His Word

Each time before reading Scripture, the catechist or catechetical leader will say these (or similar) words: Each time we gather for the adult session, we will reflect on God's Word in a manner similar to that of the children's classroom experience. This will give you an opportunity to become more familiar with the reflection process so you can guide your family through it at home. In our orientation session, we spoke about a ritual focused on this type of prayer. In every chapter, our children hear the Word of God, reflect on it, and open their hearts and minds to how God is speaking to them in this reading of Scripture.

This reflection process is based on an ancient form of prayer called lectio divina. In it we read the Word of God, listen carefully, and reflect on what God is trying to say to us.

I invite you to close your eyes, or to just be still; open your minds and your hearts to what God is saying to you in this passage. What is it that speaks to you? What one word or phrase stands out? Why might God be offering that word or phrase to you?



Quick Tip

The Scripture passage should be projected on a screen as part of the PowerPoint, or available in print at the tables, so parents can refer to it later, as they prepare for small group sharing.

Prepare participants to hear the Word of God speaking to them. Read the Scripture slowly.

Pause for a few moments for silent reflection. Model this for the group.

Allow a few moments of silence, and then ask the following questions:

- What word or phrase stood out to you?
- Why might this have meaning?

Invite the adults to take a moment to think about it and then share the word or phrase at their tables, if they choose. Encourage them to share why that word or phrase has meaning to them, once all who wish to have shared their word or phrase.

Give parents approximately 5 minutes to share at their tables. Give less time if parents are in chairs and are sharing with only one or two people next to them.

Walk around while adults discuss their reflections in small groups. This will allow you to better facilitate the large group sharing.

Listen for topics, words, ideas or themes individuals are sharing in their small groups.

Focus the group by asking, as they listened to God's Word in this passage and shared their reflections, what words or phrases stood out at their tables or seemed to have meaning for their group?

Encourage volunteers to share.

Suggestions for Facilitating Group Discussion

Facilitating conversations is a skill. With practice, that skill can be honed until facilitation comes easily. Follow the tips below to help facilitate both small and large group discussions.

Environment

Before you start, pay attention to your environment. (See Section 3 of this Leader's Guide.) Is your environment conducive to conversation? Are chairs in rows facing the front of the room? Are participants at tables facing each other? Tables are preferable to rows of chairs. It is important to allow parents to face each other for conversations. If you are limited to having participants facing you in rows, try to vary your group conversations: have participants turn their chairs to face each other in pairs, or groups of four. If participants are in pews and not chairs, you might consider letting them get up and move around for some conversations, possibly in the narthex or vestibule, where you might also offer hospitality (snacks and beverages).

Start Easy and Keep It Safe

Remember, as the facilitator of the discussion, you are responsible for creating an environment that encourages conversations. Good discussions allow time for warm-up, reflection, and feedback. Start with questions that are low-risk, meaning the participant doesn't risk being vulnerable. Warm up your group with these low-risk introductory questions, which allow members of the group to get to know each other, and with questions that review last month's theme. These early conversations warm up a group for more in-depth, reflective conversation later.

Set Ground Rules

As in any group setting, it is important to lay the foundation for the activity. Ground rules establish that it is of utmost importance to maintain an environment of respect. Participants should listen respectfully. People should not interrupt a speaker. No more than one person should speak at a time. One person cannot monopolize the time of the group. Each person gets an opportunity to share an answer.

Start In Small Groups

If you have a large group of parents, make sure that your questions always start in small groups. (Small groups should be 3–8 people; 2 is a little too intimate to start with, but with over 8 people, not everyone gets a chance to talk.)

Patience

Pose a question and allow time for parents to discuss. Sometimes we rush this initial process, thinking that participants will go off subject if we give them too much time to chat. If this is a low-risk question, they won't need much time for discussion. If this is a more reflective question, or if it asks them to share their own stories, allow a little more time. Walk around the room, listening to and even participating in table discussions. Listen for topics, words, ideas, or themes being shared by individuals in their small groups that you could start with in the large group discussion process.

Listen Well

Listen for answers you can point out to the large group later as a valuable addition to the conversation. This shares the answer without putting any one specific person on the spot.

Large Group

After small groups have had time to discuss the question, propose the question in the large group for a wrap-up discussion.

If no one offers to share at first, allow a moment or two of silence. Don't be ready to move on too quickly. Good things happen when adults are given the opportunity to hear each other's stories. Be sure to avoid putting pressure on people to answer personal questions, especially in the initial sessions. Affirm people and the courage they show in their sharing by showing them that you heard them. Validate their questions and concerns by expanding on them. Most often, once one group hears another's reflections discussed, they will want to add a comment, or another group will want to share what they learned.

When the topic is high risk, allow a variety of ways for participants to answer. As a group, they could write down a response to the question. Then all written answers would go to the facilitator or to a volunteer to read. Another option is to have a volunteer share another person's response without identifying that person. Tell them that they can share a response that resonated with them or moved them by saying something like "one person in our group shared..."

Sharing Your Faith

It might be appropriate to offer your own personal reflection in the large group. When we're willing to show vulnerability and share our own faith, others will follow. They will feel like "we're in it together" when you are willing to get personal yourself. But there is a risk here; don't share your own personal stories too often, or people will wonder if you think these sessions are all about you.

Wrap-up

Before moving on to the next part of the session, it is important to summarize and integrate what we've heard. Affirm and validate people by showing that you heard them. Use large group responses to lead into the next part of the presentation. Always thank participants for sharing their answers with each other and with the large group.

Suggestions for Using Media

According to recent statistics, the average attention span of adults is twenty minutes. This is a reality of our fast-paced culture, and as such, we must be prepared to present material in shorter and varied sound bytes. Parents and children alike are used to using media to learn, to scan for information, to entertain, and to challenge their minds.

We need to keep in mind that if we talk “at” a group for too long without changing the format, voice, or topic of the material, then we will lose them long before we’ve reached the end of the presentation.

Shift gears often. Vary your style between a talking presentation, video presentation, images with text, and breakout conversation with large and small group sharing.

Keep in mind that the presentation is a conversation.

While it will be facilitated, it should always remain a conversation—not a monologue.

PowerPoint® and other media are critical to this style of presentation. If you are not familiar with developing PowerPoint presentations, take a class, or enlist a high school or college student to help you learn the basics. Even most junior high students can put together sophisticated PowerPoint presentations. They can show you how to insert videos, images, and more. You can also read books on putting together great presentations, and Microsoft also offers some easy online tips that anyone can follow. (See page 22.) If you have mastered PowerPoint and want to use a more sophisticated presentation tool, try creating your presentation on a program like Prezi.

Be well prepared. Do not be tied to your PowerPoint so much that you can only present by reading bullet points off of the screen. The PowerPoint should be a helpful tool that leads to conversation and that serves as a reminder about which point is next. It should not be the entire script for the presentation.

Post important information on PowerPoint slides.

Questions for large group and small group sharing, prayers, Scripture verses, reflections, interesting statistics a parent might want to write down, and websites and book recommendations should all be included in your presentation.

Make your presentation visually interesting. After you’ve determined that you are capable of mastering the PowerPoint presentation, play with templates, fonts, etc. The most important thing to keep in mind is the inclusion of media. Images and graphics can drive a point home.

Check out Microsoft free images for graphics and photos, provided you are not selling your presentation, or charging money to see the presentation. (See page 22.)

Keep slides visually interesting, but not crowded. Do not overcomplicate PowerPoint presentations with too many transitions and animations. Let your content speak.

Video can spark conversation. YouTube is just one resource that offers millions of video clips as possible content for your presentation. Their material is free, but you need converter software to format and download the video for your presentation. There are free converters online, but for the best quality invest in one of the many converter software programs available at reasonable prices, for example iSkysoft or MovAvi.

In the last couple of years there have been a number of Catholic media sites that have begun to offer video material. Some are subscription sites; some are free sites. Take time to become familiar with their material and find the videos and images that most suit your parish’s needs. (See page 22.)

Section 7 (continued)

For Further Study

Websites

For help with PowerPoint:

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/powerpoint-help/3-rules-for-a-great-presentation-HA001188713.aspx>

For free graphics and photos:

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/images/>

<http://www.computerhope.com/issues/ch000845.htm>

For help with social media:

<http://mashable.com>

OSV Curriculum Division

<https://www.facebook.com/OSVCD>

OSV Teaching Catholic Kids

<https://www.facebook.com/TeachingCatholicKids>

OSV Books

<https://www.facebook.com/OSVBooks>

OSV News

<https://www.facebook.com/osvnews>

Brandon Vogt (Catholic Media Guru and author of *The Church and the New Media*)

<https://www.facebook.com/brandon.w.vogt>

Word on Fire Media

<https://www.facebook.com/WordOnFire>

Archdiocese of Milwaukee (C4—Ignite the Faith videos)

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Archdiocese-of-Milwaukee/355703527834405>

Busted Halo

<https://www.facebook.com/bustedhalo>

Salt and Light Media

<https://www.facebook.com/saltandlighttv>

Suggestions for Session Transitions

When offering intergenerational programming, safety and security of the children and the comfort of their parents are of utmost importance.

Transitions can be very important for children. They can be times of boredom, discomfort, or uncertainty for young children. Gathered sessions can feel chaotic to children, especially to children with special needs. Instead, we should use time of transition to create ritual and a sense of predictability. Be intentional about structure and procedures. Create a routine for transition times.

If you begin your Family + Faith Sessions as prescribed in Option 1, parents will drop children off in their classrooms. At the end of the age-specific learning, catechists will escort children to the large group gathering area.

The catechists will gather children and process together through the hallway. Catechists can use this time to ask students to reflect quietly on something they heard (or the catechist may offer a theme for reflection) or together they may recite prayers students are learning. In moving from the classrooms to the large group learning area, the catechist should manage behavior by ensuring that children know the expectations.

Once in the large group space, catechists will take students to the front of the large learning space. Parents will claim their children and proceed to a table or other space in the large group learning area, where they can share with each other what they've learned.

If your parish begins with children and parents together, with children processing to the classroom after an opening session, catechists should follow the above suggestions in reverse. First, children should be dismissed from the large group learning area with their catechist. It is suggested to move younger grades with their catechists first, beginning with first grade, moving through second grade and so on.

Catechists, again, should make sure children know the expectations. They should use this time to ask the students to reflect quietly on something they heard (or the catechist may offer a theme for reflection) or together they may recite prayers the students are learning. As soon as catechists and children regroup in the classroom, the catechists should remember to take attendance immediately. If at anytime a child needs to leave the classroom, classroom aides or hallway monitors should be made aware so that they may monitor the child's whereabouts at all times. Be sure all volunteers have been through your diocesan's safe environment/child protection training. Encourage parents to do the same.

Church Documents and Scripture Support

The Church teaches that parents are the first and most important educators of their children. The following Scripture verses and Church documents express support for this teaching:

The Great Commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)

"... love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up."

Psalm 78:4-7

"We do not keep them from our children;
we recount them to the next generation,
The praiseworthy deeds of the LORD and his strength,
the wonders that he performed.
God made a decree in Jacob,
established a law in Israel:
Which he commanded our ancestors,
they were to teach their children;
That the next generation might come to know,
children yet to be born.
In turn they were to recount them to their children,
that they too might put their confidence in God,
And not forget God's deeds,
but keep his commandments."

Catechesi Tradendae (Catechesis in our Time)

"The family's catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. This special character has been rightly stressed by the Church, particularly by the Second Vatican Council.³ Education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children's tenderest age,⁴ is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. This catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, a bereavement) care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events. But that is not enough: Christian parents must strive to follow and repeat, within the setting of family life, the more methodical teaching received elsewhere" (68).

Catechism of the Catholic Church

"The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children.⁵ In this sense the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life"⁶ (1653).

"In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*.⁷ It is in the bosom of the family that parents are 'by word and example . . . the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children'⁸" (1656).

“The fecundity of conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children, but must extend to their moral education and their spiritual formation. ‘The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.’⁹ The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable¹⁰” (2221).

Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization in the Modern World)

“One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity. At different moments in the Church’s history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of ‘domestic Church.’¹¹ This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms part. Families resulting from a mixed marriage also have the duty of proclaiming Christ to the children in the fullness of the consequences of a common Baptism; they have moreover the difficult task of becoming builders of unity” (71).

Familiaris Consortio (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World)

“... parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it.¹² ... The right and duty of parents to give education is essential ...” (36).

“The sacrament of marriage gives to the educational role the dignity and vocation of being really and truly a ‘ministry’ of the Church at the service of the building up of her members” (38).

“... the Christian family [is] a true ministry through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated, so that family life itself becomes an itinerary of faith and in some way a Christian initiation and a school of following Christ. Within a family that is aware of this gift, as Paul VI wrote, ‘all the members evangelize and are evangelized’¹³” (39).

“The ministry of evangelization carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable. It assumes the characteristics typical of family life itself, which should be interwoven with love, simplicity, practicality and daily witness”¹⁴ (53).

“The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray. Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother—exercising their royal priesthood—penetrate the innermost depths of their children’s hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface” (60).

“The future of humanity passes by way of the family” (86).

Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World)

“The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint deliberation of spouses, as well as the painstaking cooperation of parents in the education of their children. The active presence of the father is highly beneficial to their formation. The children, especially the younger among them, need the care of their mother at home. This domestic role of hers must be safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account. Children should be so educated that as adults they can follow their vocation, including a religious one, with a mature sense of responsibility and can choose their state of life; if they marry, they can thereby establish their family in favorable moral, social and economic conditions. Parents or guardians should by prudent advice provide guidance to their young with respect to founding a family, and the young ought to listen gladly” (52).

The General Directory for Catechesis

“... Children thus perceive and joyously live the closeness of God and of Jesus made manifest by their parents in such a way that this first Christian experience frequently leaves decisive traces which last throughout life. This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable.¹⁵ It is consolidated when, on the occasion of certain family events and festivities, ‘care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events.’¹⁶ It is deepened all the more when parents comment on the more methodical catechesis which their children later receive... Indeed, ‘family catechesis precedes... accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis’¹⁷” (226).

“Parents receive in the sacrament of Matrimony ‘the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children,’¹⁸ to whom they transmit and bear witness to human and religious values... It is for this reason that the Christian community must give very special attention to parents. By means of personal contact, meetings, courses and also adult catechesis directed toward parents, the Christian community must help them assume their responsibility—which is particularly delicate today—of educating their children in the faith...” (227).

“Parents are the primary educators in the faith. Together with them, especially in certain cultures, all members of the family play an active part in the education of the younger members... The family as a locus of catechesis has an unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values”¹⁹ (255).

Gravissimum Educationis (Declaration on Christian Education)

“Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators.²⁰ This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbor. Here, too, they find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church. Finally, it is through

the family that they are gradually led to a companionship with their fellowmen and with the people of God. Let parents, then, recognize the inestimable importance a truly Christian family has for the life and progress of God's own people²¹" (3).

Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)

"The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care a vocation to a sacred state" (11).

"... where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth" (35).

For Further Study

Websites

Catechesi Tradendae

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html

Catechism of the Catholic Church

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm>

Evangelii Nuntiandi

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html

Familiaris Consortio

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html

Gaudium et Spes

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

The General Directory for Catechesis

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_17041998_directory-for-catechesis_en.html

Gravissimum Educationis

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html

Lumen Gentium

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

Section 10

Additional Resources for Evangelization, Lifelong Faith, and Discipleship

Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church by Kenda Creasy Dean; Oxford University Press, 2010.

The Church and the New Media by Brandon Vogt; Our Sunday Visitor, 2011.

Dreams and Visions: Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation by Bill Huebsch; Twenty-Third Publications, 2007.

Families and Faith: A Vision and Practice for Leaders by Leif Kehrwald; Twenty-Third Publications, 2006.

Family-Based Youth Ministry by Mark Devries; IVP Books, 2004.

Fashion Me a People by Maria Harris; Westminster John Knox Press, 1989.

Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus by Sherry Weddell; Our Sunday Visitor, 2012.

General Directory for Catechesis, Congregation for the Clergy; USCCB Publishing, 1998.

Great Expectations: A Pastoral Guide for Partnering with Parents by Bill Huebsch and Leisa Anslinger; Twenty-Third Publications, 2010.

Here Comes Everybody!: Whole Community Catechesis in the Parish by Leisa Anslinger; Twenty-Third Publications, 2004.

Intergenerational Faith Formation: Learning the Way We Live by Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald; Twenty-Third Publications, 2008.

National Directory for Catechesis, USCCB Department Of Education; USCCB Publishing, 2005.

New Evangelization: Passing on the Catholic Faith Today by Cardinal Donald Wuerl; Our Sunday Visitor, 2013.

One Million Arrows: Raising Your Children to Change the World by Julie Ferwerda; Winepress Publishing, 2009.

The Parish Guide to the New Evangelization: An Action Plan for Sharing the Faith by Robert J. Hater; Our Sunday Visitor, 2013.

Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenager by Dr. Christian Smith and Melissa Lundquist Denton; Oxford Press, 2009.

Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults by Dr. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell; Oxford Press, 2009.

Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide by Reggie Joiner; David C. Cook, 2009.

Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation by Jane E. Regan; Loyola Press, 2002.

1. Cf. *Ibid*, 36, *loc. cit.* 1308.
2. cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 25
3. Since the High Middle Ages, provincial councils have insisted on the responsibility of parents in regard to education in the faith: cf. Sixth Council of Arles (813), Canon 19, Council of Mainz (813), Canons 45, 47; Sixth Council of Paris (829), Book 1, Chapter 7: Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, XIV, 62, 74, 542. Among the more recent documents of the Magisterium, note the Encyclical *Divini illius Magistri* of Pius XI December 31, 1929: AAS 22 (1930), pp. 49-86; the many discourses and messages of Pius XII; and above all the texts of the Second Vatican Council: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11, 35: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 15, 40; the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11, 30: AAS 58(1966), pp. 847, 860; the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 52: AAS 58 (1966) p. 1073; and especially the Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.
4. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.
5. Cf. *GE* 3.
6. Cf. *FC* 28.
7. *LG* 11; cf. *FC* 21.
8. *LG* 11.
9. *GE* 3.
10. Cf. *FC* 36.
11. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11: AAS 57 (1965), p. 16; Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11, AAS 58 (1966), p. 848; Saint John Chrysostom, In *Genesim Serm.* VI, 2; VII, 1: PG 54, 607-68.
12. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Christian Education, GRAVISSIMUM EDUCATIONIS, 3.
13. Apostolic Exhortation *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI*, 71: AAS 68 (1976), 60-61.
14. Cf. *Ibid*, 36, *loc. cit.* 1308.
15. CT 68
16. *Ibidem*.
17. *Ibidem*.
18. Cf. ChL 62; cf. FC 38.
19. Cf. GS 52; FC 37a.
20. Cf. Pius XI's encyclical letter *Divini Illius Magistri*, 1, p. 59 ff., encyclical letter *Mit Brennender Sorge*, March 14, 1937: A.A.S. 29; Pius XII's allocution to the first national congress of the Italian Catholic Teachers' Association, Sept. 8, 1946: *Discourses and Radio Messages*, vol. 8, p. 218.
21. Cf. Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, nos. 11 and 35: A.A.S. 57 (1965) pp. 16, 40 ff.