

# Partnering with Parents to Nurture Family Faith

## Four Insights from Research

John Roberto  
([jroberto@lifelongfaith.com](mailto:jroberto@lifelongfaith.com))  
[www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com)



1

## Using the Four Insights to Design

How can you **Encourage** parents to grow in faith and become faith formers; **Equip** parents to incorporate faith practices into family life at home; **Engage** parents in education and formation, as well as the whole family in faith forming experiences and programs?

1. Assess how well your current practice addresses the 4 findings.
2. Identify ministries & programming that need to be redesigned.
3. Create new initiatives to engage, encourage, and equip parents and the whole family at home, church, and school.

2

### Research Finding #1.

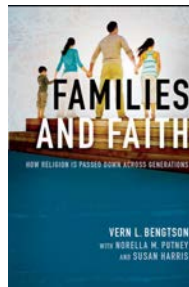
Parents are the most significant influence on the religious and spiritual outcomes of young people.

3

One of the most basic suggestions of our findings is that young adults arrive at a sense of their fundamental identity and worldview not by weighing all possible intellectual arguments for and against a proposed way of life, but rather by roughly adopting the worldview of those mentors who left the deepest impression upon them—and who loved them and cared for them the most. It should come as no surprise, then, that the emergence of the new generation of dedicated young Catholics will rise and fall with the choices of their parents.

*(American Catholic Religious Parenting, Burtkus and Smith)*

4



The single most powerful force in a child's religious formation is the spiritual personality of the parent. We know the parental factors that make a significant difference in promoting faith in children and youth include:

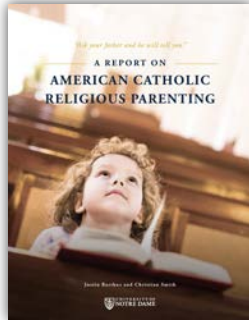
- ◆ parents' personal faith and practice
- ◆ a close and warm parent-child relationship
- ◆ parent modeling and teaching a religious faith
- ◆ parent involvement in church life and Sunday worship
- ◆ grandparent religious influence and relationship
- ◆ family conversations about faith
- ◆ family faith religious practices including praying, reading the Bible, serving others, and celebrating holidays and rituals

5

## Research Finding #2.

The primary way by which Catholic identity becomes rooted in children's lives are the day-to-day religious practices of the family and the ways parents model their faith and share it in conversation, collaboration, and exposure to outside religious opportunities.

6

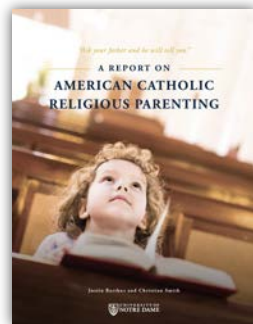


James Burkus and  
Christian Smith

University of Notre  
Dame

The primary mechanisms by which Catholic identity becomes rooted in children's lives are not Catholic schooling or sacramental preparation, but rather the day-to-day religious practices of the family and the ways parents model their faith and share it in conversation, collaboration, and exposure to outside religious opportunities.

7



This is all to say that the definitive causal agents in the religious and spiritual outcomes of American youth are neither clergy nor youth ministers, neither educators nor the voices of popular culture and media, but parents.

8



Christian Smith  
Bridget Ritz  
Michael Rotolo)

Princeton  
University Press,  
2020

Parents have only one good and hopefully effective way to raise children to understand and carry on their family's religion (or perhaps return to it someday after a period of disaffection). That is for parents simply to practice their own personal religious faith, naturally, for its own sake and as role models for their children.

If all goes well, children will over time learn, absorb, and embrace their own version of that faith, almost unconsciously.

9

### Research Finding #3.

The family is the primary community where Catholic faith practices are nurtured and practiced.

10



Christian Smith  
Bridget Ritz  
Michael Rotolo

Princeton  
University Press,  
2020

We have discovered through research that certain faith practices make a significant difference in nurturing the faith of children and teens at home.

“Raising religious children should thus primarily be a practice-centered process, not chiefly a didactic teaching program. Parents modeling religious practices is primary, and explaining belief systems is secondary”

11

1. Reading the Bible as a family and encouraging young people to read the Bible regularly
2. Praying together as a family and encouraging young people to pray personally
3. Serving people in need as a family and supporting service activities by young people
4. Eating together as a family
5. Having family conversations about faith
6. Talking about faith, religious issues, questions, doubts
7. Ritualizing family moments and milestone experiences
8. Celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home
9. Providing moral instruction
10. Being involved in a faith community and participating regularly in Sunday worship as a family

12

## Research Finding #4

The quality of a parent's relationships with their children or teens and the parenting style they practice make a significant difference in faith transmission.

13

1. Parents cultivate relationships of warmth and love which makes everything else possible.
2. Parents balance religious firmness with religious flexibility in their parenting to maintain more positive relationships with their children.
3. Parents balance desire for religious continuity with children's agency. They transmit their faith to their children while honoring their children's agency by teaching principles and values, providing expectations of religious participation and responsibility, not forcing faith, allowing exploration and mistakes, and showing respect for children's views

14

4. Parents talk with their children about religious matters during the week. This is one of the most powerful mechanisms for the success or failure of religious transmission to children.
5. Parents practice an “authoritative” parenting style. Parents maintain and enforce high standards and expectations for their children while simultaneously expressing a lot of open warmth and connection to their children and confidently giving them enough space to work out their own views and values.
6. Parents listen more and preach less – conversations are more youth-centered than parent-centered.

15

## Sources for Finding #4

“The Best Practices—and Benefits—of Religious Parenting.” Davidollahite, Loren Marks, and Hal Boyd Public Discourse. February 6, 2020. (Accessed at <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/02/59688>)

*Religious Parenting: Transmitting Faith and Values in Contemporary America.* Christian, Smith, Bridget Ritz and Michael Rotolo. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020.

16



## Using the Four Insights to Design

How can you **Encourage** parents to grow in faith and become faith formers; **Equip** parents to incorporate faith practices into family life at home; **Engage** parents in education and formation, as well as the whole family in faith forming experiences and programs?

1. Assess how well your current practice addresses the 4 findings.
2. Identify ministries & programming that need to be redesigned.
3. Create new initiatives to engage, encourage, and equip parents and the whole family at home, church, and school.

17

## Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*

The family is the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one. The task of education is to make us sense that the world and society are also our home; it trains us how to live together in this greater home. In the family, we learn closeness, care and respect for others. . . . Every day the family has to come up with new ways of appreciating and acknowledging its members (276)

18