

# ***Families at the Center of Faith Conference***

## **Diocese of Buffalo**

**August 16-17, 2017**

**Presenters: John Roberto & Leif Kehrwald**

### **Resources**

- *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. Leif Kehrwald, Gene Roehlkepartain, Jolene Roehlkepartain, and John Roberto (LifelongFaith, 2016).
- Handouts, resources, & PowerPoint presentations: [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com)
- Families at the Center website: [www.FamiliesattheCenter.com](http://www.FamiliesattheCenter.com)

### **Program**

#### **Wednesday**

9 am Welcome, Opening Prayer

9:30 am **Topic 1. Families in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

→ In parish or regional groups

1. A Profile of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Families
2. The Role of Families in Faith Forming
3. Transforming our Approach

12 noon Lunch

1:15 pm **Topic 2. Strategies for Developing Ministry with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Families: Presentation and Application to Parish Life**

→ In target audience groups: 1) families with young children, 2) families with older children; 3) families with young adolescents, 4) families with older adolescents; or 5) families with children or 6) families with adolescents

#### **Part 1. Family Faith at Home**

- Discovering God in everyday life
- Forming faith at home through the life cycle
- Forming faith through milestones

#### **Part 2. Family Life and Parent Formation**

- Developing a strong family life
- Empowering parents and grandparents as faith formers

#### **Part 3. Families in the Parish Community**

- Celebrating seasonal events through the year
- Encountering God in the Bible through the year
- Connecting families intergenerationally

## Thursday

- 9 am Opening Prayer
- 9:30 am **Topic 3. Designing a Plan for Parish Ministry with Families**
- Part 1. Digitally Enabled and Connected Approaches, Methods, and Media for Ministry with Families: Presentation and Application
- Part 2. A Parish Plan for Ministry with Families
- 12 noon Lunch
- 1:15 pm **Topic 4. Preparing to Launch a Parish Plan and New Initiatives with Families**
1. Processes and tools to introduce new family initiatives and manage change in the parish community
  2. Curating resources
  3. Developing a digital platform
- 5:00 Closing

## Presenters

**Leif Kehrwald** has worked in family ministry and faith formation on the local, regional, and national levels for more than thirty years. Currently he serves Parish Pastoral Administrator at St. Charles Catholic Church in Portland, Oregon. He also serves as an adjunct staff member of Vibrant Faith. Leif has published several books and numerous articles on family life, family ministry, marriage, and youth ministry, including *The Catholic Faith and Family Bible*, to which he served as general editor, published by HarperOne. Leif has taught courses on family ministry, parish partnership and family spirituality at Dominican University (Chicago), Loyola University (Chicago), University of Dayton, and Mount Angel Seminary in Oregon. He travels frequently throughout the country offering presentations and workshops on family faith development.

**John Roberto** of LifelongFaith Associates works as a consultant to churches and national organizations, teaches courses and conducts workshops in faith formation, and has authored books and program manuals in faith formation. He is also the Project Coordinator of the *Certificate in Faith Formation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*—a two-year online ministry education program, sponsored by Vibrant Faith. His latest publications include *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* (editor and co-author, 2016), *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* (editor and co-author, 2015), *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2015), *Generations Together* (co-authored, 2014), *Faith Formation 2020* (2010), and *Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners* (2006).

# Research Summary

## Parents & Families Today

1. There is no single family arrangement that encompasses the majority of children today. Two-parent, married couple households are on the decline.
2. The overwhelming majority of mothers and fathers say that being a parent is extremely or very important to their overall identity and a rewarding experience.
3. Parents are busier than even—and often “overwhelmed”—managing and balancing work, education, family life, young people’s activities, and their own personal lives. Today’s family is far more complex than in prior decades as parents deal with constant and accelerating change.
4. Nearly 15 million children in America live below the official poverty level. Low-income families with children age 8 and under face extra barriers that can affect the early years of a child’s development. Parents in these families are more likely than their higher-income peers to lack higher education and employment, to have difficulty speaking English and to be younger than 25.
5. Parents turn to people close to them (family and friends) for advice on raising their children. Mothers tend to have extensive support networks that they can rely on for advice.
6. A large majority of parents young people say that get along well or pretty well, have fun together, and feel close to each other.
7. Young people are very involved in a variety of extracurricular activities, but parents with higher income and higher education are more likely to report that their children participate in activities.
8. A majority of parents—across income levels—are involved in their children’s education (talking with teachers, attending school meetings, going on class trips.)
9. Parents’ biggest concerns are about the well-being and safety of their children; being bullied, struggling with anxiety or depression, being kidnapped, getting beat up or attacked, getting pregnant/getting a girl pregnant, getting shot, getting in trouble with the law.
10. Parents want their children to be honest and ethical as adults, caring and compassionate, and hardworking. The top values that are important for them to teach include (in order): being responsible, hard work, religious faith, helping others, being well mannered, independence, empathy, obedience, persistence, creativity, tolerance, and curiosity.
11. Parents and their children are immersed in media and the new digital tools. There is a widespread adoption of new digital technologies and mobile devices that are transforming the way parents and children relate, communicate, work, and learn. Parents can be divided into three groups based on how they limit or guide their children’s screen time with each group representing about one-third of all parents: *digital limiters*, *digital enablers*, and *digital mentors*.

12. Generation X parents and Millennial parents have distinct parenting styles that reflect their generational experiences as well as the current world in which their children are growing up. In general Gen X parents approach child-rearing as a set of tangible practices that will keep their children safe, reasonably happy, well-behaved, and ready to take on life's challenges. They practice protective parenting. In general, Millennial parents, reflecting their values of individuality and self-expression, focus more on a democratic approach to family management, encouraging their children to be open-minded, empathetic, and questioning—and teaching them to be themselves and try new things. They are moving away from the overscheduled days of their youth, preferring a more responsive, less directorial approach to activities.
13. Generation X and Millennial parents reflect an increasing diversity in religious beliefs, practices, and affiliation. A growing number of parents and whole families are now religiously unaffiliated and/or spiritual but not religious. Twenty-three percent of Generation Xers and over thirty-four percent of Millennials are not religious affiliated and the number of unaffiliated Millennials is growing.
14. Families of Generation X and Millennial parents are participating less in church life and Sunday worship. Parents may bring their young people to educational programs and milestone celebrations (first communion, confirmation), but they are not participating in Sunday worship or other church activities. Religion and spirituality may be important to families today, but for many it is not usually expressed by participation in churches.
15. Generation X and Millennial parents are providing religious socialization and religious transmission in declining numbers. Significant indicators, such as religious identification as a Christian, worship attendance, marriages and baptisms in the church, and changing generational patterns, point to a decline in family religious socialization across all denominations. There is also a decline in religious traditions and practices at home. Gen X and Millennial parents often lack the religious literacy and religious experiences necessary for faith transmission. Many did not grow up in families where they experienced religious traditions and practices. Many were away from a church for ten or more years before returning with their children for baptism or the start of Sunday school or first communion. They lack the fluency with the Christian faith tradition or the confidence to share it with their children.

# Parents and Families Have a Diversity of Religious-Spiritual Identities

## Four Spiritual-Religious Types

We can identify at least four spiritual-religious types of parents (and families). The *Engaged* are parents/families for whom faith is central to their lives, who are transmitting this faith to their children and are actively engaged as a family in a church community. They are spiritually committed and growing in their faith. They have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for them to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world.

The *Occasionals* are parents/families who participate only occasionally in church life—in seasonal celebrations, major events, and programs involving their children, and for whom transmitting a religious faith primarily means bringing their children to educational programs at church. Some may even attend worship regularly and send their children to religious education classes. Their spiritual commitment is low and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual. While receptive to an established church, these parents/families do not have a faith commitment that would make their relationship with God and participation in a faith community a priority in their lives. Their occasional engagement in church life does not lead them toward spiritual commitment.

The *Spirituals* are parents/families who identify themselves as spiritual, and even Christian and practicing their Christian faith, but with no connection to a church community. They identify themselves as spiritual—they pray, read the Bible, serve others—but don't identify themselves as Christian necessarily. These parents and families can be described as Spiritual but Not Religious, and by “religious” we mean *not* engaged with an established Christian church or denomination. They may be spiritually hungry and searching for God and the spiritual life, but are not affiliated with organized religion and an established Christian tradition. Some may join a nondenominational Christian church focused on their spiritual needs or focused on their family, providing engaging experiences for children and youth and/or the whole family.

The *Unaffiliated* are parents/families who are non-affiliated and for whom religion and spirituality are not important elements of their family life. They may believe in God (most “Nones” do), but religious faith or spiritual practices are not present in their family life. It is not only the parents who are not affiliated, the whole family is not affiliated. They tend to reject all forms of organized religion.

## Unaffiliated Parents Raising their Children Religiously

In her book *Losing Our Religion: How Unaffiliated Parents Are Raising their Children* Christel Manning presents her research into the worldviews that are included within the term “None” and how those beliefs are reflected or not reflected in the way parents raise their children. She identifies four distinct worldviews among unaffiliated parents: *Secular* (believes there is no God that influences the world or human life), *Seeker Spirituality* (believes there is no God but there is a higher power or life force), *Unchurched Believer* (believes in a personal God who listens and can intervene in human affairs; and prays or attends services), and *Indifferent* (no beliefs or practices).

She identifies five different strategies that parents use to incorporate religion in the lives of their children.

1. **Nonprovision:** These are parents who do not incorporate religion into their children's lives. They do not intentionally include religion or spirituality in the home life (no "God talk," religious books, meditation or prayer; holidays are cultural; religious meaning is not explained); do not enroll the child in institutional religious or alternative worldview education programs; and remain unaffiliated.
2. **Outsourcing:** These are parents who rely on other people to incorporate religion into their children's life. They do not intentionally incorporate religion or spirituality in the home, enroll the child in formal program like CCD or Hebrew school or Sunday school, and decline to become members of that religious institution. There was a common theme: they felt a duty as a parent to provide religion, regardless of their personal ambivalence about it, because their child "had a right" to this information. Sometimes this was because religion (usually Judaism or Catholicism) was a family heritage; sometimes because it reflected an interest/inclination of their child.
3. **Self-provision:** These are parents who try to incorporate religion into their children's upbringing without institutional support. They remain unaffiliated, do not enroll their child in formal religious education program, and intentionally incorporate religion or spirituality into home (talk to child about God or higher power; pray or meditate with child, read religious stories; incorporates religious or spiritual explanations into holidays).
4. **Alternative:** These are parents who were unaffiliated before they had children and reported searching for and eventually affiliating with an organization that welcomes doubters and the nonreligious such as the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) or the American Humanist Association (AHA). They enroll their child in a "worldview education" program, which typically teaches children about many different religions, rather than socializing them into one of them; intentionally incorporate religion/spirituality in the home but do so in consciously pluralistic way, for example, by combining imagery from both Buddhism or Judaism, or celebrating the holidays of various religions; or, over time, is led by having children to affiliate with a community that they perceive as tolerant of being nonreligious.
5. **Traditional:** Some unaffiliated parents decided to return to the religion they were raised in and enroll their child in a conventional religious education program (CCD, Sunday school, or Hebrew school). Parents are Traditional if having children leads them to return to the community they were raised in and re-affiliate, a child is enrolled in conventional religious education program, and they incorporate religion in the home.

Manning found that in most cases, there was a great deal of consistency between the parent's religious or secular identity and how they raised their children. She observes, "the fact that most parents in the study took steps to incorporate religion into the lives of their children is surprising only if we take None to mean the absence of any religious, spiritual, or philosophical worldview. Once we discover the more substantive dimensions of unaffiliated parents' worldviews, we see that they transmit those beliefs and practices to their children much as affiliated parents do."

# Catholic Profile

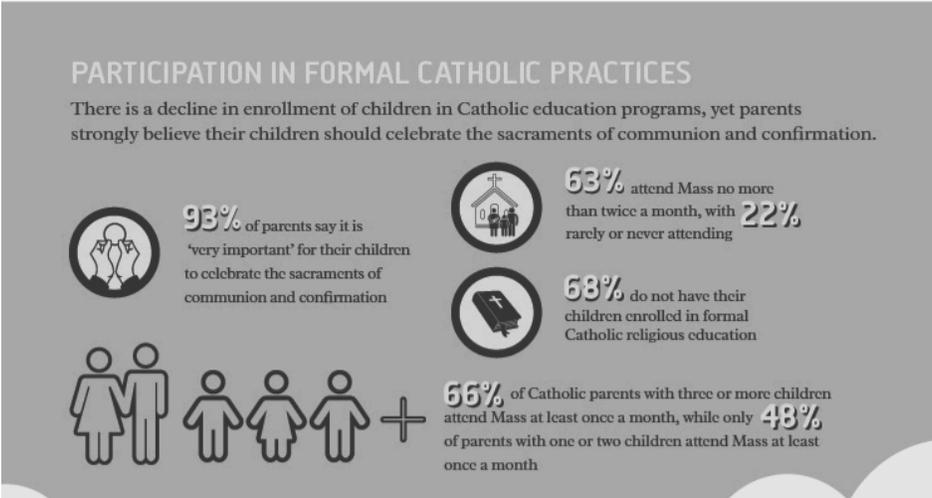
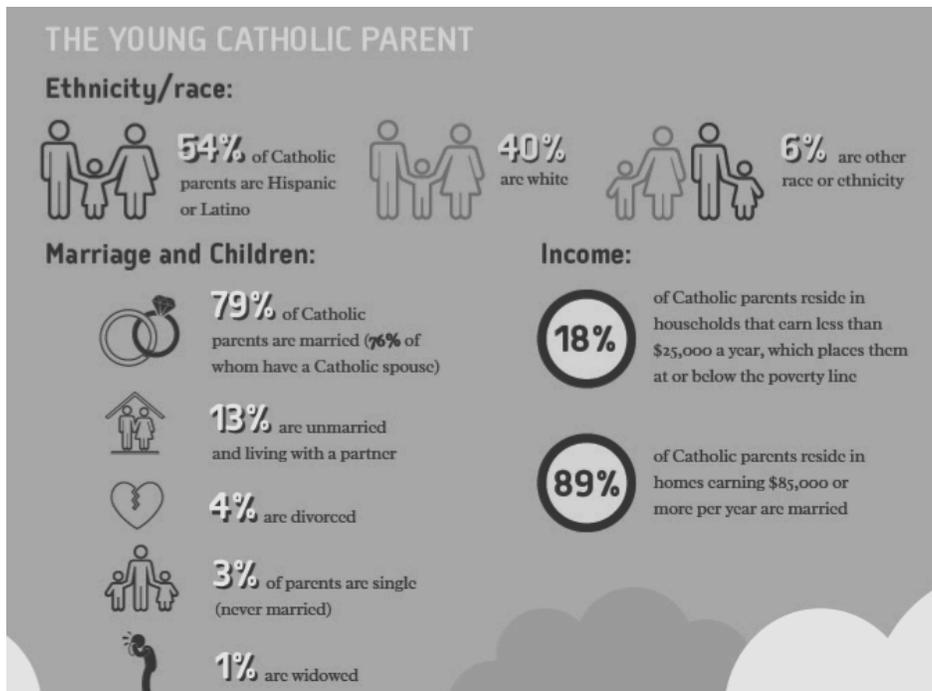
## CARA & Holy Cross Family Ministries

(<http://www.hcfm.org/en/AboutUs/FamilyResearch.aspx>)

### Importance of Catholic Faith

About half of parents (49 percent) say that their Catholic faith is either the most important part of their life or among the most important parts of their life

|   | Parents | All adults |
|---|---------|------------|
| The most important part of your life                | 15%     | 14%        |
| Among the most important parts of your life         | 34%     | 27%        |
| Important, but so are many other areas of your life | 39%     | 40%        |
| Not too important in your life                      | 9%      | 13%        |
| Not important in your life at all                   | 3%      | 6%         |



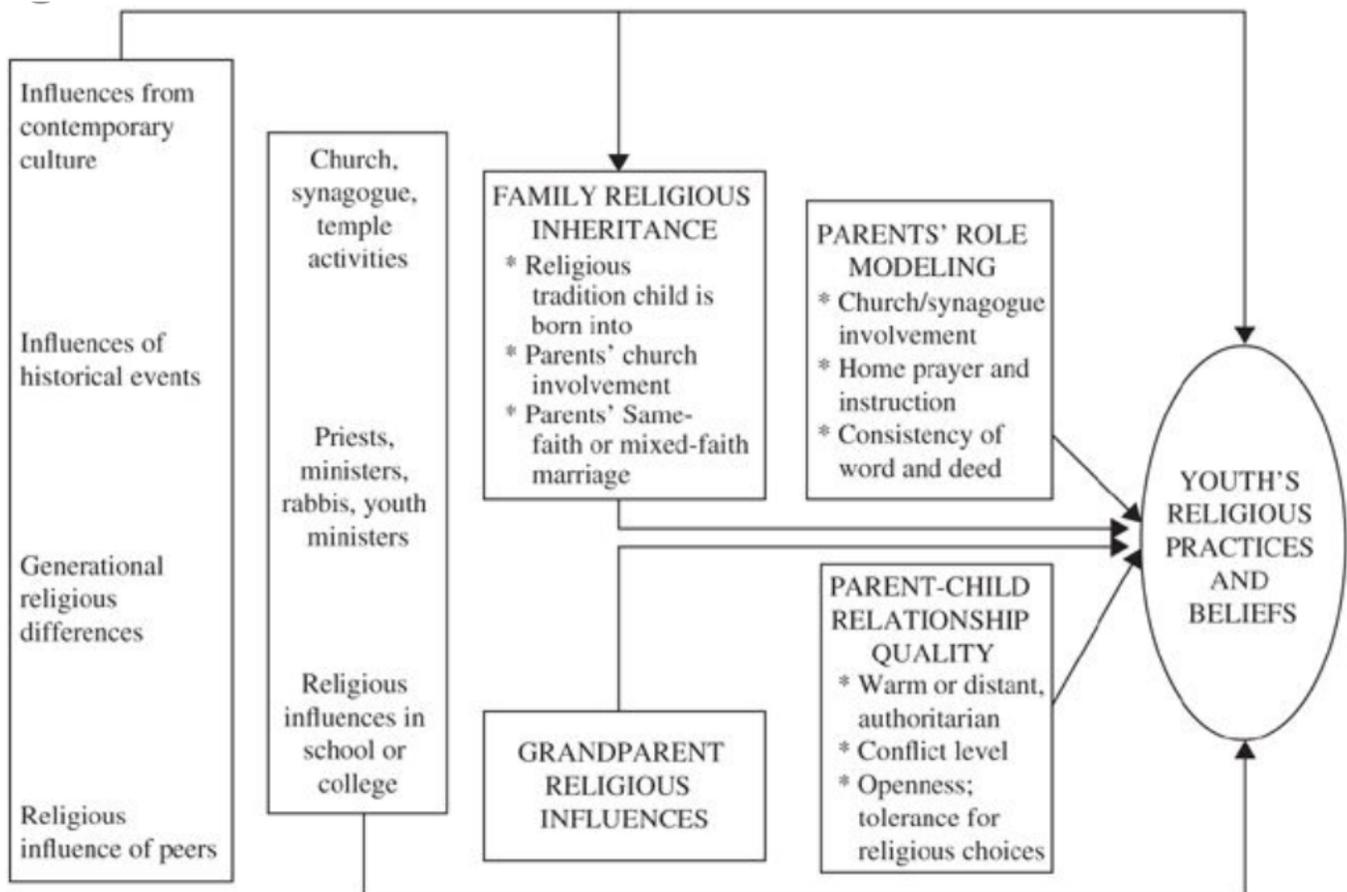
# What Makes a Difference in Faith Transmission

## Key Factors

1. Parents' personal faith and practice
2. Parent-child relationship: close and warm
3. Parents' modeling and teaching a religious faith
4. Parents' involvement in church life
5. Grandparents' religious influence & relationship
6. Religious tradition a child is born into
7. Parents of the same faith
8. Family conversations about faith
9. Embedded family religious practices: praying, reading the Bible, serving, celebrating holidays and rituals

## Intergenerational Religious Momentum

(From *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations* by Vern Bengston with Norella M. Putney and Susan Harris. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.)



# Catholic Religious Parenting

(From *A Report on American Catholic Religious Parenting*. Justine Bartkus and Christian Smith. University of Notre Dame, 2017)

## Key Findings: Transmission

1. The crucial location where youth's religious outcomes are largely decided is not the congregation or the parish, but the home.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. The single most powerful force in a child's religious formation is the spiritual personality of the parent.
5. Effective transmission of the Christian faith is completely possible for parents who genuinely intend this goal.
6. Parents by the power of their personality, practices, and way of being, model and generate the culture of the household (both explicitly and implicitly).
7. Parents produce, induce, and interpret the household's experiences of Christian faith.
8. Parents are one influence among others - they are nevertheless the dominant influence which orders and shapes the way children experience other influences, i.e. they constellate children's experiences of various cultural currents, including religion..
9. Both parents and churches need to understand the cultural and psychological centrality of parents' role in religious transmission.
10. The faith of the household is a common fund from which all draw freely. To be effectively handed on to children, such faith cannot be perceived as "belonging" only to parents, even if parents must often coerce children into participating in religious activities.

## Faith Transmission as a Cultural Project

The American household is a cultural project, built and developed by parents both consciously and unconsciously. It imparts to children an overall sense of identity and basic aspirations, orienting children to other cultural influences that they encounter outside the home, including religion.

We believe that any parent who wishes to pass on their Catholic faith must understand their home as a miniature culture, a project which initiates children into certain core values, practices, and modes of experience, all of whose validity is constantly tested by what parents do and say in interpretive reinforcement of those core convictions. In the home, children receive wisdom about what matters in life, what commitments demand investment of time, energy and emotion, and generally what a viable adult existence should look like. This idea of parenting as the building of a culture is often underappreciated; more prominent is the notion of parenting as a series of decisions regarding which experiences and investments will maximize children's future well-being. Yet whether parents realize it or not, children are generally inclined to follow the grain of parents' own attitudes and commitments, especially when it comes to religion. That is, in addition to providing for their well-being, parents inevitably teach their children how to live.

Of course, the culture of a household is influenced by other factors. Parents draw upon schools, extended family, mass media, and—especially significant for us—religious institutions and congregations in order to form their children. Parents are nevertheless the dominant influence on children, not only because they occupy a preeminent position with regard to communication and intimacy in young people’s lives, but also because they make administrative choices about how the family spends its time, what priorities are most esteemed in the household, and what sorts of opportunities children will encounter through which they will develop their values, identity, and a sense of responsibility.

This means that parents are an *ordering* influence. They do not simply yield their children to the effects of other influences (such as teachers, peers, or coaches), but shape how children interpret such influences. Gradually, over the course of their children’s development, parents assist in bringing together the disjointed fragments of children’s experience of the world into a coherent and meaningful whole, making sense of their lives and providing a template for how to move about in the adult world.

In the current American context, the transmission of Catholicism to the next generation must be understood as a cultural project of the household. It can only succeed if children enter adulthood with the conscious perception that being a practicing Catholic is a long-term, worthwhile, and primary life commitment.

The transmission of Catholicism to children is a fundamental choice that parents make for their household, a commitment which, to succeed, must be reinforced as a value of greatest priority. We define “successful” or “effective” transmission as occurring when children enter adulthood with the perception that being a practicing Catholic is so worthwhile or necessary that it demands a long-term, primary self-commitment. In cases of families whose children were not yet adults, we considered “success” to mean that children exhibited not only a general nonresistance to religion, but in fact demonstrated an overall eagerness, enjoyment and engagement with it in their current stage of development.

## **Three Primary Roles in Transmitting Religion**

In our particular social circumstances, then, parents play three primary roles in transmitting religion:

### **1. Sponsor of the Catholic Faith**

Parents are the point of access between the Church and their children. To differing degrees, neighborhoods, ethnicities and mainstream cultural attitudes toward religion have all declined as cultural “carriers” of Catholic belief. If children are not initially exposed to the Catholic faith by their parents, they usually will not be exposed to it at all.

### **2. Gatekeeper of the Catholic Faith**

Parents have nearly total control over how much and what sorts of religious content their children encounter—whether children attend Catholic school; whether prayer, reading the Bible, or receiving Communion and going to Reconciliation will occur regularly in their lives; whether they will be exposed to relationships and communities that have a religious dimension, and so forth. Parents are thus the “gatekeeper” of religious content for their children. To use another metaphor, parents are like a faucet, determining whether religious content will arrive in children’s lives at an occasional drip or in a regular flow.

### 3. Interpreter of the Catholic Faith

Parents do not act as a neutral medium, a mere channel, between Catholicism and their children. Rather, they are definitive role models, mentors, who embody a specific manner of being Catholic. They teach children how to apprehend the world, how to understand what is good and what is evil, how one ought to affectively, intellectually and practically engage with the world, and so on. They do not just “represent” the faith; in many cases, they are the only meaningful embodiment of that faith in the lives of children. Parents render faith a matter of flesh and blood rather than a lifeless mishmash of doctrines and teachings. If children do not “see” Catholicism in the “face” of their parents, they will likely never gain sufficient familiarity with it to commit to practicing the faith in the long run.

As “sponsors,” “gatekeepers,” and “interpreters” of the Catholic faith for their children, parents give children a glimpse of what Catholicism seems to be all about and whether or not it can meaningfully inform one’s day-to-day life.

Because parents’ commitment to practice and transmit Catholicism in the household is so demonstrably different from mainstream American culture, we found that those parents who embraced the three roles listed above were the ones who succeeded in transmission. They understood religious transmission to be a holistic, foundational household commitment of high priority rather than simply as one aspect of life alongside others. Successful parents were more likely to express how unimaginable and untenable family life would be without religion; their homes were more replete with visible religious art, and they had little difficulty reporting meaningful conversations and common experiences among the family that related to religion. By contrast, those parents who were less successful in transmission described households with a thinner religious atmosphere. It is not that these parents did not intend or desire to transmit their Catholicism, but rather that their aspirations did not translate into the establishment of a vivid Catholic culture in the home.

Ultimately, the decisive question our interviews suggested to us was this: had children been initiated into a cultural worldview where they perceived that being Catholic *mattered*, where faith had been so thoroughly and convincingly modeled, lived and shared that children either perceived no alternative to embracing Catholicism, or far preferred being Catholic to any other path? Had children been initiated into a lived template for carrying on a Catholic way of life, for navigating the twists and turns of growing up with their faith as a guiding resource?

### Four Components that Produce and Shape the Religious Household and Snapshots of Effective Transmission

It might now be helpful to explain with more precision what goes into creating a “religious culture” in the household: we must clarify its foundations, the mechanisms by which it is constructed, the material that constitutes the edifice, and the means by which it works its effects. We have conceived the following framework in order to describe the genesis of parents’ religious attitudes and the process by which they are expressed in the home, thereby shaping the religious life of the household. In the emergence of every religious household, from the most devout to the most religiously cavalier, there are four components that describe the manner in which parents conceive, express and communicate their religious beliefs:

1. Parents' **motivating narrative** for transmission (the why): the story that parents tell of their own religious journey, a uniquely personal narrative which frames and motivates whether, why, and how they transmit their faith to their children.
2. Parents' degree of **reflective intentionality in channeling the religious culture of the household in a purposeful direction** (the how): the question here is whether parents ever eschew "autopilot" mode—an unreflective immersion in day-to-day activities, religious or otherwise—in order to consider not just their life, but also what sorts of practices are necessary to achieve those aims.
3. **Religious content** (the what): religiously significant practices, relationships, and experiences to which children are exposed through the influence of parents.
4. **Enacted interpretation of family's religious commitments** (events of availability of faith to children): discrete events, regular occasions, or extended processes by which children are not merely exposed to religious content, but through which they perceive religion's significance to their parents' lives, their family's life, and their own orientation to the world.

From the first item on this list to the fourth, there is a coherent sequence which describes a general process of communication: from

1. parents' religious belief as a preexisting given  
to
2. parents' conscious reflection upon whether and how to share it  
to
3. the concrete giving over of the faith, and finally  
to
4. the consummative act of a child's receiving and seeing for herself what has been communicated.

### **Enacted Interpretation**

. . . . successful religious transmission is an act of *parental self-communication*, a sharing of something precious, a constitutive element of a parent's sense of self. What parents say, do, and decide religiously must, over the long run, transparently communicate their most precious religious convictions and values, such that by emerging adulthood, children no longer see Catholicism merely as an abstract ideology or set of beliefs that can be critically accepted or rejected, but as something more intimate than that. Children must see the faith as something which mattered intensely to mom or dad, which animated the love and care that went into their parenting, and therefore into a child's entire way of encountering the world.

Parents must make efforts to enable their children to interpret what they are all about. Perhaps we could sum this up by saying that parents who wish to transmit their faith must assume the role of religious mentors, treating their children as apprentices in faith, especially as they enter adolescence. As with any good mentor, parents have a duty to communication and transparency: their lives must clearly stand for something, and that something must be discussed, shared, and bolstered through questioning and trials in order to prove its worth. Such religious mentorship, whether it is exercised well or poorly, creates a sphere of religious influence outside of which children generally do not venture in order to find themselves as adults. The children of the most successful parents we interviewed would find it difficult to achieve the critical distance necessary to reject their faith, since acquiring such a perspective would mean establishing

an impersonal, critical distance from the most beloved figures of their lives: their parents. Once a young person has identified his parent as an authentic and trustworthy religious mentor, it seems unlikely that he would ever feel the need to outright reject or substantially depart from the faith that anchored and animated his mom or dad's approach to leading a worthwhile life. After all, formative encounters with mentors typically become a constitutive element of our adult identities and worldviews.

Parents, then, must render their faith available to their children—must speak, relate, and deal with them religiously in such a way that children are able to understand and appropriate for themselves the faith that is so important to their family. Parents must adopt an attitude of listening to their children, attentive to their needs, experiences, and developmental capabilities, so as to prove effective when they speak to them. Just as in any conversation, parents must at this point cede full control over what their children are thinking and deciding religiously, while at the same time remaining unafraid to communicate what they wish to share. Achieving such effective interpretation requires that there emerge discrete events, regular occasions, or extended processes by which children are not merely exposed to religious content, but perceive religion's significance to their parent's life, to family life, and to their own orientation to the world.

The occasions in which the religious "light turns on" for children include the religious processing of unpredictable events of trauma or sadness, such as divorce or a sudden death in the family. At these times, a mutual emotional vulnerability and frankness about faith can bind parents and children together. We spoke with one family in which two children returned from alcoholism and deep individual struggles to the practice of their faith after coming to appreciate the same spiritual authors and books which mom and dad had long discussed with them at the dinner table, and whose tapes they had listened to in the car (much to their chagrin at the time). Alternately, a parent's profound conversion or unexpected deepening of faith can provide similar occasions for mutuality and witness. However, less dramatic and more regular practices such as intimate one-on-one time between parent and child, or substantive religious dinnertime conversation can perform a similar function.

Perhaps the one phenomenon which joins together all these meaning-rich events is *conversation*. Parents described sharing all manner of religious chatter with their children, talk which in almost every instance seemed to carry beneficial effects: pleasant sharing of thoughts about the homily while out to eat after Sunday Mass, parents' willingness to open up about their own religious past or to speak about the family's religious identity and its underlying reasons, answering questions about a strange Bible story that a young child had read in religion class, listening and defending religion during discussions of thorny social issues with questioning teenagers, and even repeating eye-roll-inducing slogans ad nauseam to fend off children's whininess about having to get out of bed and go to church. When combined with the provision of layers of rich Catholic content to children, honest and frank talking about the faith, whether in emotionally charged circumstances or as a habitual manner of course, may be the single most important thing parents can do to prime their children for the "Aha!" moments of coming to belief.

*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.*

## Pope Francis on Family Faith (*Amoris Laetitia*)

*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)*

*Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith. This is made difficult by current lifestyles, work schedules and the complexity of today's world, where many people keep up a frenetic pace just to survive. Even so, the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbor. (287)*

*Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek him and sense their need for him, for only in this way does "one generation laud your works to another, and declare your mighty acts" (Ps 144:4) (287)*

*Family catechesis is of great assistance as an effective method in training young parents to be aware of their mission as the evangelizers of their own family. (288)*

*Education in the faith has to adapt to each child, since older resources and recipes do not always work. Children need symbols, actions and stories. Since adolescents usually have issues with authority and rules, it is best to encourage their own experience of faith and to provide them with attractive testimonies that win them over by their sheer beauty. Parents desirous of nurturing the faith of their children are sensitive to their patterns of growth, for they know that spiritual experience is not imposed but freely proposed. (288)*

*The work of handing on the faith to children, in the sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole family in its evangelizing mission. It naturally begins to spread the faith to all around them, even outside of the family circle. Children who grew up in missionary families often become missionaries themselves; growing up in warm and friendly families, they learn to relate to the world in this way, without giving up their faith or their convictions. (289)*

*In all families the Good News needs to resound, in good times and in bad, as a source of light along the way. All of us should be able to say, thanks to the experience of our life in the family: "We come to believe in the love that God has for us" (1 Jn 4:16). Only on the basis of this experience will the Church's pastoral care for families enable them to be both domestic churches and a leaven of evangelization in society. (290)*

# Family Faith Practices

**1. Please select up to 10 practices from the list below that you consider the most important family faith practices for helping children and teens grow in faith (place a check mark in the left column). In the right column, please check the practices that your family actually does – today or in the past.**

| <b>Most Important</b>  | <b>In Our Family</b>     |
|--|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Praying as a family (meal time, bedtime)   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Praying as a family during times of struggle or crisis                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Encouraging teens to pray alone or with peers  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Reading the Bible as a family  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Encouraging teens to read the Bible alone or with their peers                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Celebrating rituals and holidays at home   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Serving people in need as a family   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Serving people in need as individuals (parents, teens)                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Eating together as a family  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Having family conversations   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Talking about faith as a family   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Watching videos, movies, or TV shows with religious content or themes                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Encouraging teens to talk about their doubts and questions about faith                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Talking about faith and your religious tradition with your children and teens               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Asking your teenager's perspectives on faith, religion, social issues, etc.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16. Providing moral instruction   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 17. Demonstrating a warm and affirming parenting approach                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Taking time to growing in your own faith as a parent  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 19. Engaging in positive communication with children and teens                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20. Encouraging children and teens to pursue their talents and interests                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 21. Spending one-on-one time with children and teens  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 22. Participating in Sunday Worship as a family   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 23. Inviting friends of your teen to join in family practices (Sunday worship, service, prayer) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 24. Celebrating the church year seasons at church (Advent/Christmas, Lent/Easter)               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25. Celebrating rituals and sacraments at church as a family                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 26. Participating in church life activities as a family   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 27. Encouraging and supporting your teen to participate in church activities with peers         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**2. Are there other faith practices that your family engages in (or engaged in) that were not listed above.**

**3. What are two or three of the biggest challenges your family faces (or faced) in trying to live these faith practices? Please share these challenges.**

# Family Faith Practices Research

*The Family Faith Practices research you will be doing replicates the survey that Leif Kehrwald conducted among parents and this is reported in Chapter 4 of the Families at the Center of Faith Formation book.*

1. Read Chapters 2 and 4 in the *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* book before you conduct the interviews and/or focus groups.
2. Organize a small scale research project in your own congregation or setting by interviewing parents of children, teens, and young adults in their 20s using 1-1 interviews or focus groups of 10-12 parents. Interviews should take no longer than 15 minutes; focus groups no longer than 45 minutes.
3. Try to organize interviews and/or focus groups for three age groups: parents of children (birth to 12), parents of teens (13-19), and parents of young adults (20s). Invite parents personally.
  - For interviews set up a mutually agreeable time to talk. It would be best if it was face-to-face, but you can do it via phone. Make sure parents have the page with questions (you can email the page to people you interview by phone).
  - For focus groups set up a time for each of the three focus groups (after Sunday worship or at a special gathering or at the same time their children or teens are involved in an activity, program or class). Invite parents personally to participate. Try to get 12 parents for each of the three age-group sessions.
4. Use the questions on the next page as the structure for your interview or focus group. Make copies for each parent and have them give you their completed form after the interview or focus group. Take notes on paper or on your laptop/tablet to record key points in the discussion.
  - Be sure to explain the purpose of the interview and/or focus group and how the data will be shared at the Symposium, and that everything is anonymous.
  - For question #1: Give parents time to complete the survey. Then invite them to share 2 or 3 family faith practices that they consider most important to help children/teens grow in faith. Then ask them to share at least 1 practice they live as a family.
  - For question #2: Invite the parents to add other practices and record these on paper or computer/tablet.
  - For question #3: Invite parents to share the challenges. Record their responses. Be sure to ask clarifying questions so that you understand the challenges that are being shared.
  - Be sure to collect the survey form from the parents.
5. After you have completed your interviews and/or focus groups, compile the results. Develop three reports – one for children, one for teens, and one for young adults.
  - Tabulate the results of question #1 - family faith practices - by adding up the responses to each item for Importance and for Actual Family Practice. Identify the top items of Importance and the top items for Actual Practice.
  - Compile the results to question #2 – additional family faith practices.
  - Compile the results to question #3 – look for common themes in the responses you have received. Try to identify 4-5 challenges that emerged in each group.

## What's Your Parish's Approach to Families?

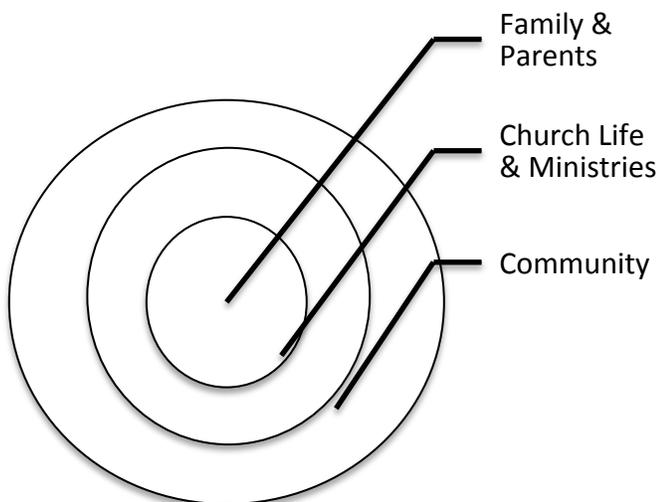
Identify your parish's approach with families using the following questions. (See Chapters 1 and 3 in *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* for background.) For each question, identify your congregation's current practice with parents and/or families using the rating scale:

|  | 1 = not at all |   | 3 = often |   | 5 = a lot |
|--|----------------|---|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1. We <i>express care</i> with the families in our parish and community, including listening to them, showing interest in their lives, and investing in them.                            | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 2. We <i>challenge growth</i> in families by expecting them to live up to their potential and helping them learn from their mistakes.  | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 3. We <i>provide support</i> and advocacy when families really need it.  | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 4. We <i>share power</i> with families, treating them as true partners by giving them voice in things that matter to them and collaborating with them to solve problems and reach goals. | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 5. We encourage families to <i>expand possibilities</i> by connecting them with other people, ideas, and opportunities to help them grow.  | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 6. We offer regular <i>gatherings of all our families</i> for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.   | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 7. We engage families <i>together with the whole community</i> for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.                                      | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 8. We find ways to <i>reach families at home</i> with support, resources, and activities to develop family life and grow in faith.   | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 9. We <i>strengthen families</i> by helping them develop the practices and skills for healthy family life.   | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 10. We equip parents with the <i>knowledge and skills</i> for effective parenting and forming faith in young people.   | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 11. We engage parents <i>as leaders and contributors</i> in the congregation and in the community.   | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 12. We design ministries, projects, and activities that <i>complement and reinforce</i> the role of families in faith formation.   | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 13. We recognize the <i>family as the epicenter</i> of faith formation across the generations.   | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |
| 14. We celebrate the evidence of <i>vibrant faith at work</i> in the everyday lives of families and their young people.  | 1              | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5         |

# Changing the Narrative: Families at the Center

| FROM A PRIMARY FOCUS ON. . . .                                     | TOWARD AN EMPHASIS ON. . . .   |
|--|--|
| Viewing the parish as the center of faith forming                  | Recognizing & equipping the family as the center of faith forming                          |
| Forming the faith of individuals                                   | Forming the faith of the whole family  |
| Engaging individuals in the life of the church                     | Engaging the whole family in church life   |
| Prescribing programs and activities for the family and its members | Building faith formation around the lives and needs of families and parents                |
| Doing things “to” or “for” families                                | Sharing power with families and treating them as partners                                  |
| Starting with messaging to families                                | Starting with listening to families  |
| Buying into negative stereotypes of families                       | Highlighting families’ strengths and resilience  |
| Giving families expert advice about what to do                     | Encouraging families to experiment with new practices                                      |
| Focusing on parenting as a set of techniques                       | Emphasizing parenting as a relationship  |
| Intimidating parents with policies and requirements                | Informing parents of their role and empowering them to fulfill their role as faith formers |

## Families at the Center of Faith Formation: Changing the Narrative



The *Family-at-the Center Approach* recognizes that parents and the family are the most powerful influence for virtually every child and youth outcome—personal, academic, social, and spiritual-religious; and that parents are *the* most important influence on the social and religious lives of children, youth, and emerging adults. Given the central role of families in shaping the lives of children and youth, the value of engaging, supporting, and educating families should be self-evident to all of us.

1. See the home as the essential and foundational environment for faith nurture, faith practice, and the healthy development of young people.
2. Reinforce the family’s central role in promoting healthy development and faith growth in children and youth, and enhancing the faith-forming capacity of parents and grandparents.
3. Express care with the families in our congregations and communities, including listening to them, showing interest in their lives, and investing in them.
4. Provide support and advocacy when families really need it.
5. Share power with families, treating them as true partners by giving them voice in things that matter to them and collaborating with them to solve problems and reach goals.

6. Build faith formation around the lives of the today's families and parents, rather than having the congregation prescribe the programs and activities that families will participate in.
7. Address the diversity of family life today by moving away from "one size fits all" programs and strategies toward a variety of programs and strategies tailored to the unique life tasks and situations, concerns and interest, and religious-spiritual journeys of parents and families.
8. Offer regular gatherings of all families for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.
9. Engage families together with the whole community for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.
10. Find ways to reach families at home with support, resources, and activities to develop family life and grow in faith.
11. Strengthen families by helping them develop the practices and skills for healthy family life.
12. Equip parents with the knowledge and skills for effective parenting and forming faith in young people.

### **Families at the Center of Faith Formation: Strategies**

1. **Discovering God in Everyday Life:** guiding families to reflect on God's presence in their daily life
2. **Forming Faith at Home through the Life Cycle:** equipping and resourcing families to practice their faith at home through prayer, devotions, reading the Bible, rituals, milestone celebrations, service, learning, and more (with activities and resources delivered online)
3. **Forming Faith through Milestones:** celebrating one-time milestones and annual milestones through experiences at home and in the congregation that activities of *naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing* (with activities and resources delivered online)
4. **Celebrating Seasonal Events through the Year:** celebrating church year seasons and calendar seasons at home, at church, and in the community (with activities and resources delivered online)
5. **Encountering God in the Bible through the Year:** reading and studying the Bible through Sunday worship and the lectionary, learning experiences, and at-home devotions and reading (with activities and resources delivered online)
6. **Connecting Families Intergenerationally:** developing intergenerational programs and experiences that engage families with other generations through learning, service, community life, etc.
7. **Developing a Strong Family Life:** cultivating a strong family life and strengthening developmental relationships through parent programs, whole family programs, family mentors, life cycle support groups, and online activities and resources.
8. **Empowering Parents and Grandparents:** developing parenting competencies and skills, promoting the faith growth of parents, and developing the faith forming skills of parents

### **Forming Family Faith: Processes & Content**

1. **Caring Relationships.** Growing in faith and discipleship through caring relationships across generations and in a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love—in the congregation and family.
2. **Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons.** Growing in faith and discipleship by experiencing the feasts and seasons of the church year as they tell the story of faith through the year in an organic and natural sequence of faith learning.
3. **Celebrating Rituals and Milestones.** Growing in faith and discipleship by celebrating rituals, sacraments, and milestones that provide a way to experience God's love through significant moments in one's life journey and faith journey .

4. **Learning the Christian Tradition and Applying It to Life.** Growing in faith and discipleship by learning the content of the tradition, reflecting upon that content, integrating it into one’s faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world.
5. **Praying, Devotions, and Spiritual Formation.** Growing in faith and discipleship through personal and communal prayer, and being formed by the spiritual disciplines.
6. **Reading the Bible.** Growing in faith and discipleship by encountering God in the Bible, and by studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today.
7. **Serving and Justice.** Growing in faith and discipleship by living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in service to those in need, care for God’s creation, and action and advocacy for justice.
8. **Worshipping God.** Growing in faith and discipleship by worshipping God with the community of faith—praising God; giving thanks for God’s creative and redemptive work in the world; bringing our human joys and dilemmas to God; experiencing God’s living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist; and being sent forth on mission.

## Families at the Center of Faith Formation: Programming

1. A **variety** of relationships, content, experiences, and resources
2. New **methods**: immersive, multimedia, multi-sensory, highly visual, participatory, experiential
3. New **formats**: episodic engagements and experiences, micro-learning, on demand, mobile, 24x7
4. New **digital** media and digital platforms; connect with parents/families through social media; redesign programming with digital connections and extensions; address new needs through online experiences
5. **Multiple environments**: self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world.
6. **Multiple versions**: design a program once and offer it in multiple formats and environments, e.g., a gathered program that is recorded and can be used for individual study or small group study

## Digitally Enabled and Digitally Connected Faith Formation

### Online

**Fully Online**  
An online program with all learning done online and limited face-to-face, gathered learning settings

**Mostly Online**  
A mostly online program with opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings

**Online and Gathered**  
Online learning focused on presenting the content of the program *combined with* face-to-face, gathered sessions using active learning methods to discuss, practice and apply the content.

**Gathered and Online Content**  
A gathered event or program that provides online content and activities to extend and expand the learning from the gathered program

### Face-to-Face

**Gathered with Online Content**  
A gathered event or program that uses online content as part of the design of the event or program

# Designing a Family Faith Formation Network

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(See Chapter 7 in *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*)

## Design a Season of Family Faith Formation Programming

The most manageable way to program a faith formation network is to develop a three-season approach: January–April, May–August, and September–December. This means launching new programming three times a year and completing updating your website three times a year with the new programming as well as recurring programming.

All of the content does not need to be introduced in the first season of programming. Over the course of a year (three seasons) programming can be added so that the complete plan is finally implemented in the fourth season. Some of the programming will be consistent in every season, while other programming will be specific to a season. Programming from a completed season is archived online (on the website) so that it can be reused in another season or re-introduced a year later.

Here is a guide to developing one season of programming. Develop a first draft of the season and then review all of the programming and make final choices about what to include in the season. Use the form (after the planning steps) to record the information to get a overall view of the season.

1. Identify the season: January 1–May 1 or May 1–September 1 or September 1–January 1.
2. Add continuing programs to the seasonal plan. Use the seasonal plan template to record the results: list the network content areas and then add the programs to the appropriate month.
3. Add intergenerational events and programs to the seasonal plan.
4. Add new programming to the seasonal plan. Try to provide new (or current) programs in *different learning environments* and/or one program in multiple learning environments: on your own (self-directed), with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, in the community, in the world. Try to implement a program idea with a *blended (digital) faith formation* strategy: gathered program with online content, gathered program and online content, online and gathered in one program, mostly online, and fully online.
5. Develop the final version of the seasonal plan. Select the program ideas for each network content area. Some content areas may have too many programs to launch in one season. Select the ones that will be included in this season and save the other program ideas for another season.
6. Schedule programming in each network content area. Some of the programming flows through multiple months in a season, such as a weekly Bible study group. Some programs are monthly, while other programs are seasonal—Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter—and therefore anchored in one or more months. Still other programming/resources are always available, such as an online course or a video program or Bible study resources.

One way to manage the variety of programming is to focus on one month of major programming in the network content areas. For example the “Learning the Tradition” content area might select one month to schedule its theology enrichment series with four presentations from guest experts and options for small group study and online study using the video recordings. The Bible area might focus its programming in different month, perhaps around a church year season, such as Lent. This

approach reduces the overlap among major programming and helps people participate in multiple experiences.

7. Develop *faith formation playlists*. This is similar to a music playlist where we curate and gather our favorite songs into our own “albums” for listening. A faith formation playlist curates content around a theme into an integrated learning plan that provides a variety of programming and a variety ways to learn.
8. Develop specific plans for each program (when needed): date or month, programming environment(s), digital strategy(s), resources, leaders, and cost.

### Seasonal Plan

| Network Content Area | Programming & Dates |         |         |         |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                      | Month 1             | Month 2 | Month 3 | Month 4 |
|                      |                     |         |         |         |

## Build the Digital Platform for Family Faith Formation

This digital platform provides the primary way to connect parents and families to the network’s offerings and to connect parents and families with each other. A faith formation website provides the platform for publishing and delivering the experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources of the network. A website provides the platform for *seamless* learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, or settings. The website, together with social media, provides continuity between faith formation in the congregation, at home, in daily life, and online. And it is available to people anytime, anywhere, and any device (computer, tablet, smart phone).

1. Choose a domain name (URL) for the family faith formation website. The congregation can either purchase a new domain name for the faith formation website from one of the companies that sell and register domain names or use a free domain name provided by the website builder, e.g., *Weebly* provides hosting and a free website URL with the weebly.com extension, such as <http://holytrinityfamilies.weebly.com>.
2. Select a website template that is mobile-responsive, which means that the website will automatically size itself correctly on a computer, laptop, tablet, or phone. The template should do this automatically.
3. Create the primary navigation (main menus) for the website directly from the network content areas. Be sure to select a website template that allows enough room for all of the menu items to be seen. There may be a need to consolidate several content areas of the network to accommodate the website design template. This involves creating submenus (secondary navigation) under the main menu items. In the new mobile-responsive designs it might be better to have a “home page” for each content area, which introduces all of the experiences, programs, activities, and resources for that content area and has buttons or links to individual pages with the content. It is harder to view and select submenus on mobile devices. It’s much easier to navigate from a “home page” with links.
4. Build each webpage to incorporate all of the programs, activities, and resources for the particular network content area in the seasonal plan. A well-designed site with quality content will increase engagement and create a positive experience for the user—all of which encourages continuous

learning. Each major content area can be constructed as a *playlist* that provides an integrated plan with a variety of media..

5. Design the website specifically for parents and families and write the content for them in their language with titles and examples that connect to their lives; select images (photo or short video) that reflect their life situations. Engage the target audience and tell them what they need to know and do. Be sure to pay careful attention to the titles and descriptions so that they capture people's interests. Develop descriptions that are positive in tone and indicate clearly the content or focus of an activity. Describe how your offerings respond to something within the lives of parents and families. Highlight the relationship between the content and the particular spiritual or religious needs, interests, passions, concerns, or life issues of parents and families. Describe the two to three benefits of participating or engaging in faith formation.

## Test the Seasonal Plan and Web Design

Begin by identifying parents within the target audience to test the website and give feedback on the seasonal programming. Invite them to a focus group meeting. Use a deliberate procedure when you test. Create a "testing process" so that you can gain important feedback. Here are four suggestions:

1. Let your user experience the network online. Show; don't tell. Let them review the website and the programming. Provide just the minimum context so they understand what to do. (Have computers or tablets available for people to use or ask them to bring a device to the focus group.)
2. Have them talk through their experience. For example, when appropriate, ask "Tell me what you are thinking as you are doing this."
3. Actively observe. Watch how they use (and misuse!) the website. Don't immediately "correct" what your user is doing.
4. Follow up with questions, such as: "Show me why this would (or would not) work for you." "Can you tell me more about how this made you feel?" "Why?" "Do you find things that interest you and connect with your life?" "Are there things you would have liked to see?"

Based on the feedback from the focus group(s), determine what revisions to make in programming and website design. Consider inviting members of the focus group(s) to become reviewers throughout the season of programming. Stay in regular communication with them, asking for feedback on their experience of the website and the programming.