



Parents & Families at the Center of Faith Formation

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Materials: www.lifelongfaith.com/lacongress.html

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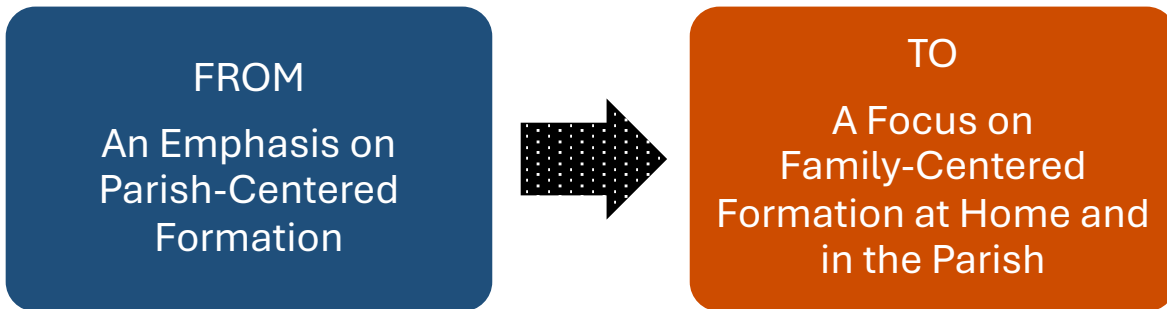
Presentation

1. What is research telling us about family faith formation today?
2. What is our vision and goals for family faith formation today?
3. What is a “framework” for family faith formation in the first two decades of life?
4. What are examples of family catechesis models and approaches?



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Families at the Center: Shifting our Perspective



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The slide features a dark blue vertical bar on the left side containing the NCCL Parents & Families logo. The main area of the slide has a background of wavy, overlapping bands in shades of light blue, green, and orange. The text 'Part 1' and 'What is the research telling us?' is centered in the middle of the slide.

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Important Insights from Research on Parents & Family Faith Formation

CARA Research Study – Spring 2024

1,533 self-identified Catholics, expecting or have a child 0-18 years

NCCL Family Project Research Study

8000+ parents in 200 parishes across the U.S



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Insight #1

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

The single most powerful force in a child's religious formation is the spiritual personality of the parent.

Parental factors that make a significant difference include the personal faith and practice of parents and caregivers, and a close, warm, nurturing parent-child relationship.

It is critically important that parents are authentic examples of what they claim to believe. Their authenticity includes faithful living as well as sharing with their children their struggles and failings.



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Parent Faith & Practice

A continuum of religiosity and practice

- ◆ 36% - Active Believer, involved in a parish community
- ◆ 44% - Believer, occasionally involved in a parish community
- ◆ 17% - Inactive Believer, not involved in a parish community
- ◆ 4% - Inactive Nonbeliever

Viewing Self Religiously

- ◆ 16% - The most important part of your life
- ◆ 33% - Among the most important parts of your life
- ◆ 34% - Important but so are many other areas of your life
- ◆ 11% - Not too important in your life
- ◆ 6% - Not important in your life at all

Importance of Catholic Faith

49% say their faith is “among the most important” or “the most important” part(s) of their lives



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Parents' Mass Attendance

- ◆ 9% - More than once a week
- ◆ 22% - Every week
- ◆ 14% - Almost every week
- ◆ 16% - Once or twice a month
- ◆ 20% - A few times a year
- ◆ 17% - Rarely or never attend Mass

Parents attending Mass weekly or more often are more likely than those attending Mass a few times a year or less often to say that Catholic is “the most important of part of your life” (33% compared to 9%)



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Parents' Parish Involvement

Younger parents, those 18 to 29 and those 30 to 44 are among the most likely to say they are “very involved” with parish activities or ministries outside of Mass (29% and 28% respectively).

Weekly Mass attenders are the most likely to be “very involved” in these activities (46%).

47% of Catholic parents “always” or “most of the time” participate in parish activities with their children.

60%+ say it is “extremely” or “very” important for their children to celebrate Baptism, First Eucharist, and Confirmation.



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Parent Beliefs

1. God cares for me in a special way (57% strongly agree)
2. I know that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died on a cross and rose again
3. I am keenly aware of being in the presence of God in my life
4. My faith helps me know right from wrong
5. I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation
6. My faith shapes how I think and act
7. I have a sense of sharing in a great purpose
8. I see evidence that God is active in the world
9. Religious faith is important in my life
10. I have a real sense that God is guiding me (44% strongly agree)



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Insight #2

#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.

The primary responsibility for passing on religious faith and practice to children rests with parents; parishes (and Catholic schools) are secondary and primarily serve to provide support. This means that the most important agent in the religious and spiritual outcomes of children and youth are neither clergy nor youth ministers, neither educators nor the voices of popular culture and media, but parents.



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Parent Perception of Children's Enthusiasm about Being Catholic

The following family practices were statistically significant predictors of a parent saying their child was reacting enthusiastic/positive about being Catholic.

- ◆ Reading the Bible as a family
- ◆ Encouraging children/teens to read the Bible alone or with their peers
- ◆ Reading the Bible as an adult
- ◆ Talking about faith and spirituality as a family
- ◆ Celebrating rituals and sacraments at church as a family

The more frequently a family does these things the more likely their children are responding positively to being raised Catholic.



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Parent Perception of Children's Enthusiasm about Being Catholic

- ◆ A parent who said their **family “regularly” talks about faith and spirituality** together is more than four times likely than a parent who said their family “never” does this to say their child is positive about being Catholic than not enthusiastic/negative.
- ◆ Similar probabilities are associated with
 - ◆ celebrating rituals and sacraments at church as a family
 - ◆ reading the Bible as a family
 - ◆ encouraging children/teens to read the Bible alone or with their peers



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Insight #3

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

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



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Family Faith Practices

Practice	CARA	Parent Surveys
Eating together as a family	#1	X
Having family conversations about faith	#2	X
Providing moral instruction	#3	X
Praying as a family	#4	X
Celebrating Church year seasons	#5	X
Praying as a family during times of struggle or crisis	#6	X
Having family conversations about faith/spirituality	#7	X
Participating in Sunday Mass as a family	#8	X
Encouraging teens to pray	#9	-
Serving people in need as a family	#10	-



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Insight #4

#4. The quality of parents' relationships with their young people and the parenting style they practice make a significant difference in faith transmission.

Parents and caregivers who cultivate relationships of warmth and love make everything else possible.

A parenting style that sets religious expectations for children, with flexibility, and that focuses more on listening, and less on preaching, makes a huge difference in faith transmission.

These parent and caregiver qualities are conducive to parents and caregivers talking with their children about faith, practice, and religious matters. It's about living into the faith rather than passing on the faith.



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We're doing a good job & it's important to us.

- ◆ 36% - Excellent
- ◆ 44% - Very good
- ◆ 17% - Good
- ◆ 2% - Only fair
- ◆ 1% - Poor

Rating their job as a parent

- ◆ 61% - Most important
- ◆ 33% - One of the most important
- ◆ 5% - Important but not one of the most important aspects
- ◆ 1% - Not too important an aspect

Importance of being a parent to who you are as a person



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Parent Practices: What We Do

1. I encourage my children/teens to pursue their talents and interests (62% very much)
2. I cultivate a warm, compassionate, and loving relationship with my children/teens
3. I engage in positive communication with my children/teens
4. I demonstrate a warm and affirming parenting approach with my children/teens
5. I spend one-on-one time with my children/teens
6. I engage my children/teens in family conversations
7. I provide moral and values formation of my children/teens
8. I ask for forgiveness when I am wrong or mess up
9. I try to balance religious firmness (what we believe and how we live) with religious flexibility (not forcing faith, but inviting and exploring), and respecting my child's views
10. I engage my children/teens in family conversations about faith and religious matters
11. I practice my faith and share it with my children/teens
12. I participate with my children/teens in activities, e.g. service projects



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Interest in Parent Enrichment

At least 40% of all parents said they were very interested in these topics:

- Discussing tough topics with my children
- Learning to listen to my children/teens and talk with them about things that matter to them
- Managing screen time and social media use with my children/teens
- Getting involved with my children/teens in serving people in need
- Developing the strengths and potential of my child
- Managing my time and balancing the many commitments as a parent



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Interest in Parent Enrichment

- Developing strong relationships of warmth and love in our family and express care for each other
- Encouraging children/teens to talk about their doubts and questions about faith
- Providing moral and values instruction to my children'/teens and teaching them healthy concepts of right and wrong
- Growing in my (parent) relationship with Jesus Christ and what it means to follow Jesus in daily life
- Growing in my (parent) understanding and practice of the Catholic faith
- Praying together as a family



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Part 2

What is our vision?

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Families in the Directory for Catechesis

The *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) presents the family as central to catechetical ministry and the Church's future.

The family is a community of love and of life, made up of a complex of interpersonal relationships. . . . through which each human person is introduced into the human family and into the family of God which is the Church (226).

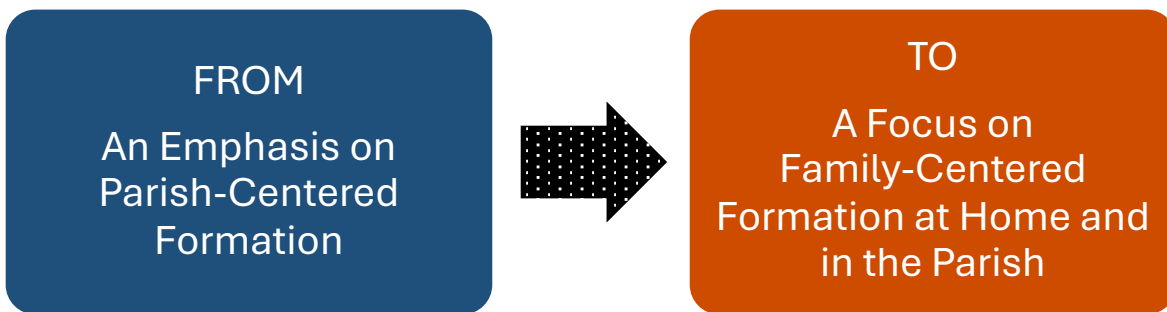
The *Directory* presents family catechesis in three ways:

1. **Catechesis *in* the family** – emphasizes the central role of the family in nurturing faith
2. **Catechesis *with* the family** – emphasizes the role of the parish community in forming the faith of families, centered on the kerygma
3. **Catechesis *of* the family** – emphasizes the role of the family in proclaiming the Gospel



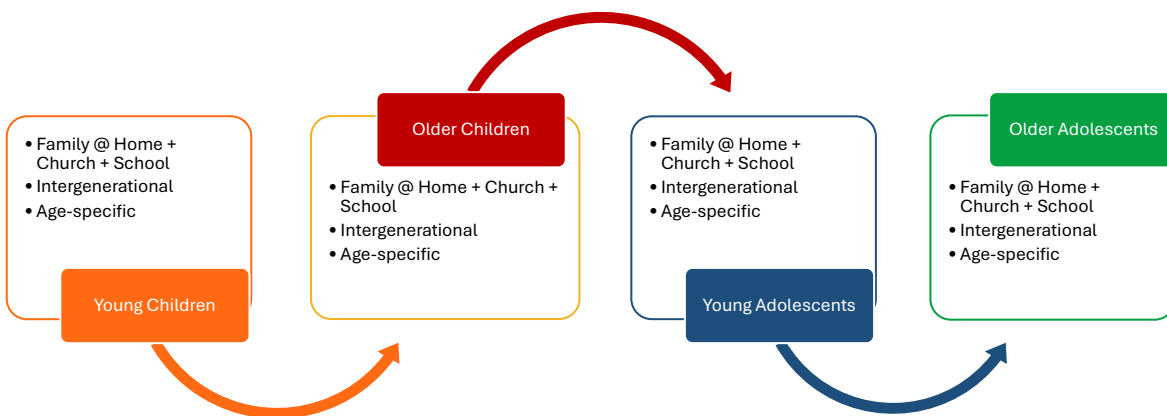
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Families at the Center: Shifting our Perspective



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Family Faith Formation in 0-19 Years Old



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A Framework for Family Faith Formation

- ◆ Forming the faith of the family at home
- ◆ Forming the faith of the family in the parish
- ◆ Equipping parents with practices and skills for parenting
- ◆ Equipping parents to be faith formers of their children/teens
- ◆ Providing family catechesis for the entire family
- ◆ Fostering intergenerational relationships



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Developing a Plan for Family Catechesis: Birth to 6

Forming the Faith of the Family at Home

- Monthly digital newsletter (with website page) of activities for the whole family and age-appropriate activities for each of the five years of early childhood
 - Monthly Bible story, prayers throughout the day and week (bedtime, mealtime, seasons of the year), movie/video suggestions, family activities, etc.
- Milestones activities (online) to celebrate the transitions or rituals of early childhood, such as birthdays, baptism anniversaries, first prayers (learning the Lord's Prayer), entry to preschool and kindergarten, etc.
- "Welcome to the Season Celebration Kits" digital and print resource for the home to introduce young children to the celebration of the seasons of the Church year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints/All Souls)
- Children's "Storybook of the Month" – age appropriate suggestions of storybooks that focus on values, morals, and spiritual themes



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Developing a Plan for Family Catechesis: Birth to 6

Forming the Faith of the Family in the Parish and Intergenerational Relationships

- Connecting parents at Baptism with mentors from the parish community (e.g., grandparents) to accompany them on their journey from Baptism to start of school
- Children's Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass where children through prayers, songs and readings learn about the same Scriptures as the rest of the community
- “Welcome to Sunday Mass” experience for families with young children, including a video for parent preparation, an illustrated guide to the Mass for children to use at Mass, age-appropriate activities for children on the lectionary readings
- Parish dinner for families who had a child baptized in the past to meet other parents with young children (babysitting provided)
- Seasonal creative arts festivals, e.g., Advent wreath-making activity at the parish for families with young children and grade school children



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Developing a Plan for Family Catechesis: Birth to 6

Equipping Parents: Practices and Skills for Parenting and Being Faith Formers of their Children

- A two-part “Welcome to a New Stage of Life” workshop and/or webinar focused on understanding growth and development of young children, parent practices for this stage of life, faith forming activities appropriate to this stage of life (how to pray with children, how to read a Bible story, etc.)
- Parent enrichment webinars (monthly or quarterly) and an online parent library of videos, podcasts, and articles on topics of interest to parents of young children
- Twice yearly half-day retreat for parents of young children to nurture their growth in faith and to connect and share with other parents (with babysitting)
- Parent support groups for support, prayer, and faith sharing (in-person or online)



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Part 3

Models of Family Faith Formation

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Family Learning Process

- 1. A shared meal**
- 2. Shared prayer experience**
- 3. A family learning experience on the topic of the program with content and methods appropriate to an all-ages audience**
- 4. In-depth learning**
 - Option 1. Family learning together with activities appropriate to all ages**
 - Option 2. Parallel learning with learning activities for age groups and parents**
 - Option 3. Learning activity centers with family and age-specific learning**
- 5. A closing family activity to discover how to apply their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or digital formats.**

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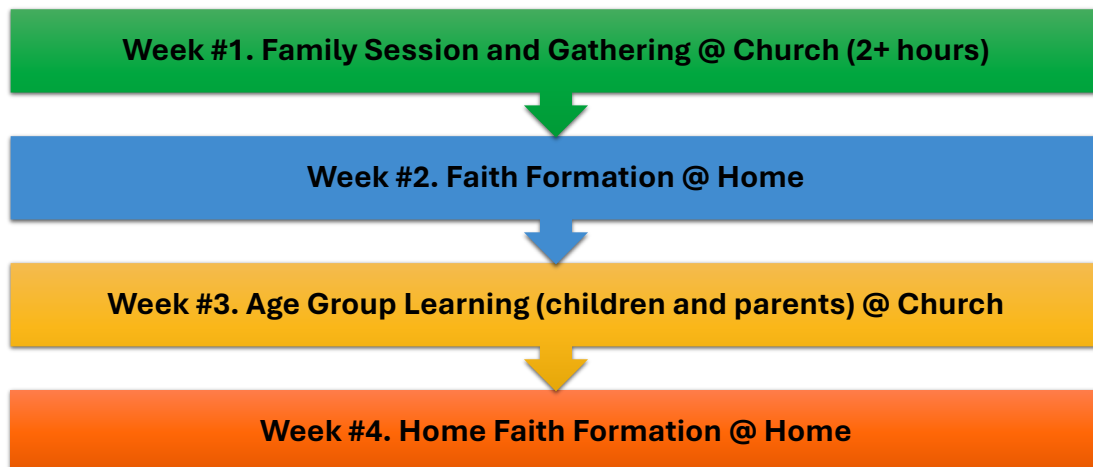
Models of Family Faith Formation

<p>Primary Model for Catechesis</p> <p>Families with children through middle school</p> <p>Monthly Twice monthly Weekly</p>	<p>Integrated Model of Family Catechesis</p> <p>With age-group catechesis</p> <p>Within sacramental preparation</p>	<p>Seasonal Family Catechesis Gatherings</p> <p>Church Year Seasons: Advent, Lent</p> <p>Fall - Winter - Spring</p>	<p>Workshops</p> <p>Retreats</p> <p>Family Small Groups or Family Clusters</p> <p>Family Vacation Bible School</p>
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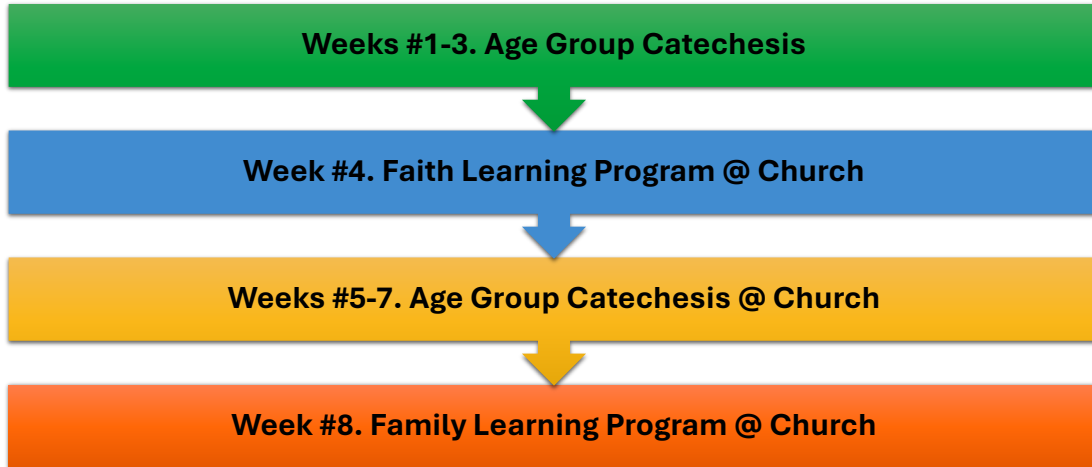
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Primary Model with Monthly Theme



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Integrated Model



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Developing a Plan for Family Catechesis

First Step Ideas. . . .

- Offer an Advent, Lent, and/or Pentecost Family Festival
- Re-design sacramental preparation sessions from child-only to parent-child family catechesis experiences
- Incorporate parents (and grandparents) into the Vacation Bible School, e.g., 1 or 2 evening whole family sessions – dinner and activities



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Developing a Plan for Family Catechesis

Expanding Ideas. . . .

- Add a whole family catechesis session – every 6 weeks - into your children’s program on one of the core themes in the curriculum
- Offer a Fall – Winter – Spring Family Workshop on family life skills applicable to the whole family (children and teens)
- Design a VBS experience for the whole family
- Design a family service experience for the whole family



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Developing a Plan for Family Catechesis

Transforming Ideas. . . .

- **Implement a family catechesis model as the primary model for children’s catechesis**
 - Large group gathering at church and/or family clusters of 6-10 families in homes
 - Hybrid: @church, @home, @online
 - Weekly, Twice-Monthly, Monthly
 - Content: Scripture, Creed, Sacraments, Morality, Prayer, Church Year Seasons, Christian Practices, and more



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