

Parents!

As summer quietly begins to fade, the alerts and announcements concerning children's programming begin. Our parish bulletin has already run registration notices for Faith Formation for a few weeks now. And, without doubt, the various school systems and their sports teams are issuing the same sort of things as they anticipate ramping up a new season.

Whenever we priests complain about our lot in life, there is always one of us who is ready to shame the others with a reminder of the sacrifices of parents. We have no cause for complaint. There is no comparison. Parents are the ones who are in the real "trenches" of life.

Acknowledging this, we as parish leaders need to re-think our all-too frequent criticisms of parents in their drop-off and pick-up relationship with the Church. Truly, it is distressing to us that only a small minority bring their kids to Mass and attend as a family. And it is that same minority who really convey to their children that the faith is something central and important. This is perilous and tragic to the majority for us who see Christian Faith as the ultimate context and horizon for this life.

However, a more compassionate evaluation of this reality underscores many problems which are a result of a certain "Catholic Culture." This "culture" of which I speak is not the true Church, but a stripped-down framework created by decades of minimalistic presentations of the faith, and minimalistic practice. Pastors, pastoral administrators, and others have cultivated a mindset wherein the Sacraments became hoops through which to jump. Add to this that, so called "CCD," led to a system of "sub-contracting-out" the faith from parents to volunteer teachers or 'catechists.'

In such a situation, parents have not been evangelized and are not equipped to do what is required of them by the promises they made at the Baptism of their children. The language of faith is not, generally, spoken at home: For very many, it is only heard at a Faith Formation Class for one and half hours-per-week for 24 sessions. The result is that there is no context or rationale for what is learned. The children must wonder, "*What does this information have to do with anything?*"

As I write this column, I am preparing to receive a phone call from Everett Fritz, author of a recent book called *The Art of Forming Young Disciples*: Fritz' book changed my thinking about parents from consternation to compassion. His contention in the book is that church leaders are unwittingly participating in a most disastrous phenomenon in our culture, the isolation "*of young people from their parents and adult guidance.*"

"We are led to believe that teenagers don't want adults in their lives . . . parents are rarely shown in a positive light (in pop-culture media)." And "one study found that adolescents spent only 4.8% of their time with parents and only 2% with adults who were not their parents." The result? "We expect them to learn to participate in the world of adults, but our culture has largely removed adults from mentoring roles with teenagers. As a result, teens are growing up in a peer dominated culture."



As we anticipate a new "pastoral season" of youth programs in the Church and as we study proposals for a renewed Youth Ministry in our parish, I am increasingly convinced that we need to form positive, supportive alliances with parents. "**Parent coaching**" is one idea we are going to test wherein we bring parents of young ones in for certain Faith Formation sessions and 'coach' them to be the teachers of the session. And, inspired by Everett Fritz, we are also contemplating a "small group mentoring" approach to Youth Ministry wherein the real needs of the youth, **to be understood, to belong, to be themselves, to engage in critical thinking, and to receive adult guidance** in the ways of life and of faith will be offered.

Please pray, earnestly, that we will find the spiritual wherewithal to really make a difference for both our youth and their parents. . . All for the greater glory of God.