

Family Catechesis in the Diocese of Stockton

What is Family Catechesis?

The basic concept of family catechesis is a parish-based, family centered catechesis process through which families are formed in the Catholic faith. This means the parish supports and accompanies parents/guardians in their role as primary educators of the faith. The aim is to strengthen the Domestic Church; the family is the Domestic Church.

In the early Church, the practice of teaching the faith in the home traces back to our Jewish roots and the oral tradition of passing on the faith. Families came together to learn about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and continue spreading the Good News. Today, although the tradition of passing on the faith continues to take place in the home, church leaders have accepted the overall responsibility as primary educator of the faith.

The purpose of family catechesis is to give back the responsibility of teaching the faith to the primary educators, of placing the responsibility where the Church says it belongs, in the hands of the parents/guardians.

Domestic Church - parents are “the first heralds of the faith” (CCC 1655-1658)

“parents are the primary educators; the primary catechists...the Church promises to help parents foster their children’s faith and assists them specifically in their role as catechists of their children” (NDC, Chap 8, section C).

Why change the approach from the typical Religious Education program to family catechesis?

First, statistics reveal the decline in church attendance among Catholics in general. “In an article by Gallup, it was reported that from 1955 to 2017, weekly church attendance by Catholics steadily declined to the tune of 75%. Catholics, ages 21 to 29, declined, older Catholics 50 years and older has also declined since

1955 “leading to the current situation where no more than 49% of Catholics of any age category report attending church” (*Catholics Church attendance*. Gallup 2018).

Second, through family catechesis the focus of the formation is shifted from the children to the parents/guardians. By recognizing the parents/guardians as primary educators, parish leaders can equip the adults with the tools and confidence needed to embrace their role as primary educators of the faith. Moving to an adult-based formation is key to strengthening the domestic church.

Changing our approach is necessary. Time has revealed that what we have been doing for the past fifty years is not working. Families appear less interested in practicing the faith and simply interested in meeting the requirements to receive the Sacraments; even children as young as ten years old are no longer interested in the faith. Finally, parish religious education programs tend to model the school structure which results in treating the faith like a subject rather a way of living life. Family catechesis restores the promise of the Church to support parents/guardians in their role as primary educators and help bring families into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.

Does COVID-19 affect the implementation of Family Catechesis?

The short answer is yes. The pandemic is affecting the implementation of family catechesis, but not in a negative way. Interestingly, the start of the pandemic provided us with a unique window into the future of family catechesis. At the onset, parish leaders responded in many creative ways: sending home lessons, using social media and various online platforms to catechize, calling families by phone and more. Of course, there have been challenges.

Timeline

The Evangelization & Faith Formation office, with the help of a committee, has been working on implementing family catechesis for over a year. The committee

has put together a list of models of family catechesis and a timeline, along with some suggestions for curriculum. Undoubtedly, the onset of COVID-19 has changed some of the planning, so we begin with the timeline.

The original timeline is as follows:

- 2020-2021 Year 1 – Talk about Family Catechesis – Evangelization & Faith Formation office to discuss FC with Pastors, DRE's and catechists; parish leaders begin to review the models; discuss with parents, especially in parishes where little or no parent involvement in the formation is present.
- 2021-2022 Year 2– Experiment with the models - Pastors, DRE's and catechists review and choose potential models for their parish; put together a plan for the following year (the plan should consist of researching curriculum, parish facilities & availability, resources and collaboration within and outside of the parish, anticipate challenges, modify current parent involvement, etc.)
- 2022-2023 Year 3 – Implement Family Catechesis

****Note:** this timeline will continue with modifications based on the changes in state and county directives. Due to the directives as of 7/14/20, it is highly recommended that parishes combine steps 1 and 2 this year (2020-2021) but move cautiously experimenting with only 1 or 2 models.**

Models of Family Catechesis

1. **Classroom/Traditional Model** - Children in classroom with catechist teaching a lesson. Parents are typically not involved other than to attend an informational meeting. Examples:
 - a. This model is considered temporary/transitional and leaders should plan on eventually removing it as a stand-alone option by Year 3. If used, it should only be used in conjunction with another model. Due to the pandemic, this model may be used in Year 1 via a digital platform, but parents must be nearby/visible while the catechist teaches the lesson.

- b. This model may be used to transition families that are not ready to move into one of the models or that arrived during/after the shift to FC. But FC must be fully explained so that parents understand this is a temporary/transitional model.
 - c. If used alone, the total time for this model will normally be an hour & fifteen minutes to one hour & a half, 2-4 times a month.
 - d. ***Note:** Parishes are not be able to use this model currently. One on one lessons are allowed but a parent/guardian must be present.
2. **Whole Family Model** – parents and children attend formation together; same topic is taught. Examples:
- a. The families begin together with prayer, the topic is introduced, then children are separated by age/grade and topic is taught by a catechist, parents remain in gathering space and receive formation on the chosen topic, then families are reunited for an ending prayer. The session may begin or end with a meal or light hospitality, or a snack may be given.
 - b. The families are gathered and remain together for prayer, a potential meal or snack and an activity. Because parents & children remain together, the formation portion should be short but reinforced by an activity. When necessary, parents should receive reading/information on the topic/theme approximately 1-2 weeks prior to the gathering.
 - c. For either example, the meeting time should last approximately 2 hours (or more if needed) and meet 1-2 times per month.
 - d. **Tips:** If the children are being separated for the topic lesson, don't forget to allot time for movement, for example: children with catechists & returning to parents. Also, if possible, seat families at round tables or in chairs arranged in a circle. Lastly, if possible, choose a family per table/circle to be the group contact/"herder". This family can send reminders, check up on families not attending, be a source of support.
3. **Small Faith Community Model** - these are families gathering in homes to share the faith. This model mimics the Domestic Church. Examples:
- a. Each small faith community should have approximately 8-12 members; the community may be made up of 2-4 families depending on the number of family members; families should meet 2-4 times a month depending on the availability of resources

- b. Each community should have a main contact who communicates with the parish leader and keeps track of the families; Resources should be provided such as books; topics should be given in advance through the main contact.
 - c. Resources should be self-guided; “homework” need not be turned in; that is what the main contact is for – to report any issues, unanswered questions, etc. Each adult/couple should be given the opportunity to lead a gathering; include teenagers and young adults in the leading.
 - d. Parents/guardians should receive at least a monthly formation session. It can be done via an online platform or by sending reading material via email or mailed. For adults who do not have access or knowledge of online platforms, outside gatherings are allowed as long as safety protocol is followed.
 - e. ****Note:** due to pandemic, the communities should be made up of families related by blood or longtime friends that choose to be together. Remind families of safety protocols: social distancing, wearing a mask, etc. ****This model may be a challenge at this time.**
4. **At Home Model** - parents teaching the faith at home.
- a. Parish leader provides parents with resources (books, curriculum) for parents to teach the faith at home.
 - b. Parents should receive at least a monthly formation prior to teaching their own children. The adult formation may be via an online platform, reading material via email or mail.
 - c. This model may require the parish leader or designated person to check on the parents regularly (depending on the level of knowledge). This model is recommended for parents who have at least a basic understanding of the teachings of the faith, therefore parents requesting/choosing this model should be “interviewed” to determine/assess their knowledge. ****This is a recommendation; if a parent requests this model, the parish leader should honor their request but should gently invite parent/s to take a course through this office (EFF).**
5. **Adult Faith Model** - only parents attend faith formation sessions
- a. In this model, only the parents receive the formation. Parents are gathered, meal should be provided, fellowship should be encouraged, then a topic is given.

- b. This model encourages parents to teach the faith in a very organic way, looking for God in daily activities. Books can be given if requested by parent. Most publisher offer parent and child books; many now also offer digital books.
 - c. The parish leader will meet 1-2 times a month for approximately 2 hours; give or take.
 - d. ****Note:** due to pandemic, meetings can be held via online platforms, or outside gatherings, safety protocol must be followed. Reading material may be emailed or mailed as well.
6. **Online/Virtual Model** – parents or children receiving formation via an online platform
- a. This model is a great way to meet with parents/guardians who are not able to attend in-person meetings or formations. It is a great model that allows adults with busy schedules to remain informed/connected to the parish and their own formation and the formation of their children.
 - b. ****Due to the pandemic,** this is currently a very popular model. For parish leaders with creative minds, there are many social media platforms that can be used such as Zoom, YouTube, Google, RingCentral, Facebook and many more. Parish leaders can record a presentation or invite a guest to record a presentation. The options are endless and may/should be continued to be used post pandemic.
7. **Individual/Paper lesson Model** - a prepared lesson on paper or through a textbook for families who do not have access/knowledge of the internet or online options both during and post pandemic.
- a. This model may be applied to children and/or adults
8. **Hybrid Model** – online and in-person formation
- a. If the models as they are do not reach or exclude families in your parish then it may be necessary to combine the models to include or fit the needs of the families
 - b. The reality is that most if not all parishes will use a combination of the models presented in order to reach all the families in the faith formation programs. Keep in mind that using one model only will more than likely exclude families in your parish.

Note: Regardless of the model used, it is important to bring the families together at the parish. Families can be brought together on a monthly basis, by specific

celebrations or by seasons of the liturgical calendar. Therefore, come up with a plan for the implementation; meet the pastor and any other staff members necessary. For your planning it may be necessary to conduct surveys to discover the knowledge, abilities and needs of your particular community, the availability of parish facilities or the day or time to come together. Understandably due to the pandemic, bringing families together this is not possible at this time, but we must hold on to the hope that sometime in the future we will; so plan for it.

Breaking the School model

One of the goals for the formation of the families of the Diocese of Stockton is to break the school model for parish-based faith formation programs. Implementing Family Catechesis through the use of these models will break that model. We can no longer pass along the faith the way we have for so many years, we must change our approach. To help break the school model it is highly suggested that parishes follow the Liturgical calendar. The liturgical calendar provides a wealth of church teachings and brings its families together for many celebrations. Also, as the name implies, it is the Church calendar; why not follow it?

Ongoing Formation – in order to break the school model, a change in our approach is vital. Faith formation is not a one Sacrament approach or temporary condition; our formation as Christians is ongoing and ever growing. Jesus left us a trail of sacred crumbs to God’s love; it is up to each and every one of us to pick up the crumbs that lead us to the Lord’s eternal love.

Suggestions for Curriculum - There are many more, these are just to get you started. Check with the publisher you are currently using as many are already moving to family catechesis

- Forming Families: a faith resource on Catholic identity by Dr. Kathie Amidei
- Our Family Faith Resource Guide for Family Catechesis by RCL Benziger
- Gather us In: Tools for forming families – Kathleen O’Connell Chesto
- The Pastoral Center – <https://pastoral.center/> online resource Spanish/English
- Augustine Institute – Formed, Faith at Home
- Pflaum - <https://www.pflaumweeklies.com/> Spanish/English

