



Catholic Faith Formation in the Home: Planning for COVID-19

Parents play a vital and essential role in handing on the faith to their children. This is precisely why Pope St. John Paul II referred to parenting as a “ministry.” The witness of parents’ lives and the faith lived and practiced in the home is essential to how children come to know, experience, and encounter the love of God. It forms the foundation for much of their understanding of the faith and how it is lived out. As such, the faith lived and handed on in the home is foundational to the life of the Church. Faith formation efforts in the parish then, assist and build on the life of the domestic church – the home.

Recognizing that some parents may choose to provide catechetical formation primarily in the home, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, we want to provide guidance that may be helpful for parents and parish leaders. We encourage parish catechetical leaders and parishes to reach out and be welcoming to families that have chosen or choose to provide faith formation at home. This effort of inclusion and welcoming will help families by contributing more effectively to the educational and spiritual integrity of these catechetical activities. These families should be included in pastoral and sacramental activities, ministries, and the life of the parish.

1. **Parents:** The Church teaches that parents are the “primary educators” with the “first responsibility” for their children’s growth in the faith. What does that mean? It means:
 - a. Parents are the first witnesses or primary evangelists: In their example and devotion, parents bear witness to the faith by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and service are the rule. This means that, in the home, parents seek to provide a good example; even in acknowledging their own shortcomings to their children, and thereby creating an atmosphere where mercy, virtue, and the Gospel message are continually proclaimed in word and action (see CCC 2223).
 - b. Parents are the first, or primary catechists. This means that it is from their parents that children first learn the essentials of the faith. Likewise, it is parents who teach by way of their example the truths that we profess. Parents also guide their children along the path toward a deeper knowledge and understanding of the truths of our faith – from doctrine to worship, this gradual awakening in the faith through the ministry of parenting is irreplaceable (GDC 169).
 - c. ***Taking in mind that not all family situations are the same and that every home is unique, if parents decide to provide their children with catechetical formation at home, it is recommended that they:***
 - i. Consult with their pastor or his designee on a plan for home catechesis. This need not be overly burdensome for parish leaders or parents. The Diocesan Office of Evangelization, Discipleship and Family Life is available to assist in this process as needed.
 - ii. Follow the policies and guidelines of the diocese and the parish regarding preparation for reception of the sacraments. It is possible that adaptation may be needed, and this is where communication with parish leadership is both important and helpful.
 - iii. Contact and maintain communication with the pastor, parish catechetical leader or their designee as needed, and in a timely manner about preparation for reception of a sacrament.

2. ***Parish Community:*** The parish community and its catechetical programs assist parents in their role of handing on the faith. Participation in liturgical, catechetical, and sacramental activities are a fundamental aspect of parish life, essential to one's place in the family of God, and an expectation that flows naturally from the communal nature of the Catholic Church. That said, there are a couple of important points to understand regarding the parish and catechetical formation:
- a. The parish is the “pre-eminent place for catechesis.” (GDC 257; CT 67).
 - b. “The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents” (CCC 2226).
 - c. ***Considering all of the above, parish leaders are encouraged to consider the following as possibilities to better serve parents who may choose to provide catechesis in the home:***
 - i. Have parents register with the parish faith formation or religious education program (even if not attending the “on-site” classes) so that children catechized at home will be included in all communications about parish activities and programs. Parents will need to be informed of:
 1. Faith formation activities which involve all the children of the parish.
 2. Diocesan/Parish guidelines for sacramental preparation (e.g. important dates, time sensitive requirements, etc.)
 - ii. Invite families to participate in religious education activities, retreats, or other events (even if virtual). Sacramental preparation particularly, provides an opportunity for growing deeper in the life of the parish and forming community.
 - iii. Request some record of student progress (though there are no “clock hours” or “number of classes” designation in our diocese). This could be as informal and simple as visiting with the parents to see how things are going. This is a reasonable request to ensure that suitable and adequate formation in the faith is taking place. It also creates an opportunity to discover where areas of assistance may be needed and/or opportunities for collaboration may be present.
 - iv. Consider assigning a catechist to the families that do home formation (or simply offer one to be available) so that assistance and support to parents can be provided as needed. While there is no substitute for the lived catechesis that occurs in the home through the ministry of parents, so too is there no substitute for an experienced and well-formed catechist.
 - v. Some parents may not be comfortable sending their children to on-site classes. At the same time, they may not be comfortable providing this formation at home. In this case, every effort should be made to help those parents feel comfortable in asking for and receiving the help and support that is needed for them to teach their children.
 - vi. Meet with families that choose to provide religious education in the home once or twice a year (even if virtually). This provides an opportunity for mutual collaboration, support, and shared experience that can help strengthen both the ministry of parenting and the ministry of the parish.
 - vii. Utilize social media, technology, and other virtual means to help support families and to continue to build and strengthen parish community.
 - viii. Dialogue with parents to determine what adaptations may be needed. With the challenges that COVID-19 presents, perhaps adjustments to schedules will be needed.