

Why Family Faith Formation?

No matter how good a program is, classroom catechesis only works in the context of a faithful community.

One percent of a child's life can't overcome the other ninety-nine. When faith formation is limited to the classroom, its impact is not only lessened - it can make the faith appear useless. In that case, catechesis (religious education classes) becomes just another hoop to jump through to get those sacraments checked off. It produces a "faith" that is easily dismissed once all the boxes have been checked. Of course, this is never the goal of families participating in parish religious education - but the problem remains - and it is built in to the classroom model.

Classroom catechesis can foster a "school mentality" where instead of supporting parents, the parish ends up supplanting them.

Instead, the Church calls parents their children's "primary catechists." This shows up in many writings over the last several decades:

- "Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. . . . Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God." [CCC 2223, 2226]
- "The right and duty of parents to give education is essential... irreplaceable and incapable of being entirely delegated to others." [*Familiaris Consortio*, 36]
- "Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators." [*Gravissimum Educationis*, 3]
- "The right of parents to beget and educate their children in the bosom of the family must be safeguarded." [*Gaudium et Spes*, 52]

The Church's expectation that parents act as catechists to their children might sound frightening or radical - but it really is a simple reflection of everyday reality. Parents teach their children how to walk, talk, think, and behave - it's just what happens in parenting! Most often these lessons are "caught" more than they are "taught" of course - because children learn from their parents simply by being around them.

The same is true of living the faith. If parents skip Mass anytime it is inconvenient, that is the lesson their children will learn about the importance of mass. If parents pray before meals, that is the life of prayer the children will learn. If parents spend time in Scripture and say a daily rosary, that is what the faith will look like to their children.

The faith that children affirm (or walk away from) will be the one their parents - not their parish - teach them.

Family Faith Formation is a new model based on an old idea (parents as primary catechists to their children). This represents a radical role reversal in typical Catholic religious education, but it's really just an application of the Church's mandate to form adults so that families can catechize their young. When this occurs, children are taught the faith as a way of life and not just as a weekly class.

The parish's role is one of equipping - not replacing.

The focus is on giving parents tools to help them succeed at being the religious educators that they already are. For most families, high-level theological training is not as important as faithful practices, and Family Faith Formation can help with both.

No single parish program can meet the particular needs of all families. Schedule conflicts with school, work, sports, and other extracurricular activities are sometimes impossible to fully mitigate. Family Faith Formation makes for a program flexible enough to accommodate a wider range of schedules, learning styles, and abilities.

Family Faith Formation is basically the principle of subsidiarity applied to children's catechesis.

The fact is that "Primary Catechist" is an unavoidable and irreplaceable role for parents. *It is one that parents have by nature - not one that is awarded by experts.* The Church has made it clear that the parish's role is to support parents—not supplant them, and Holy Trinity's Religious Education program is committed to doing so!