

How to *effectively* reach parents to truly enable them, not just exhort them and how the Catechetical Institute can help.

1. How to reach out to families to return to Mass?

- Defeating Anonymity – feel your way into their shoes, which means *making space to listen to them*–1) to learn their urgencies, and 2) to give them a Mark 10:21 moment – a loving, simple, personal invitation, followed by unremitting trusting patience.
- Defeating Complacency – feel your way into a place of *need for them, personally*– 1) their calling matters to you (Eph 2:10), and 2) you are incomplete (1 Jn 1:4).
- **Bottom-line of what to do:** People want to come to Church to the degree the Church wants to come to them. YOU are God's wanting.
- CI workshops that would help: Family: Domestic Church and School of Holiness / Essential Link Between Liturgy and Catechesis / A Foundational Vision: The Role of the Laity / Discipling Adults / Building the Mentoring Relationship: Empathic Listening

2. What are best practices in moving towards family-based formation?

- The *runway* is as important as the takeoff / stepping *back* is as important as stepping up / it is vital to look at *lived* models.
- Go slow and steady through parents' issues of awkwardness with faith conversations / your heart attitude changes in the direction of gentleness and a generous spirit to the degree you make time to meet with and listen to parents.
- **Bottom-line of what to do:** Genuinely *discuss* what the workshops below challenge in your parish's approaches; in your own views.
- CI workshops that would help: The Family as the Context of Catechesis / Shifting to Family-Centered Formation / Partnering with Families in Youth Ministry/ Adult Catechetical Methodologies & Learning Styles

3. What are strategies to engage families better in specific areas: First Communion, Confirmation, Children's Catechumenate, and Schools?

- Retreats – for adults – that aim at three things in Christ: 1) healing, 2) mercy, 3) kerygma. Look for models.
- Use assignments to impact interactions among family members / see the goal of all assignments as fostering the health of the home.
- **Bottom-line of what to do:** Discuss in your parish or school the degree to which your programs aim at supporting the centerpole.
- CI workshops that would help: First Penance & First Eucharist Preparation / Confirmation Preparation/ Family Systems in a Catholic School

4. How to effectively incorporate our workshops for parents?

- Think of yourself as a teacher and formator of *adults* / see your testimony and others' as *indispensably* decisive.
- Adult ministry thrives when: 1) personal invitation becomes the norm, 2) state-of-life, healing, and their urgencies are the focus.
- **Bottom-line of what to do:** Our myriad of workshops for parents are best applied surgically, specifically, and sacramentally.
- CI workshops that would help: Parent Saints / Mentoring within a Family / Fostering Holiness in Children / A Foundational Vision: The Community of the Family / The Sacramental Economy / Being Guided and Guiding Souls / Vocational Spirituality

5. What are two key areas of engaging families that most parishes overlook, that if developed will produce strong results in parish life?

- Make infant Baptism preparation a ministry of *continuity*– abandon a moment-in-time view or a sacramental-pass-class.
- Make marriage preparation a ministry of *continuity*– build a serious like-to-like, pot-stirring, personal accompaniment.
- **Bottom-line of what to do:** Ask yourself, if these two sacraments were the *only* preps available, what would we dream/dare to do?
- CI workshops that would help: Mentoring Other Families / Theology of the Family/ Conversion in Modern Culture/ upcoming help

6. What other helpful resources does Franciscan have to offer to help our parish or school succeed in our mission?

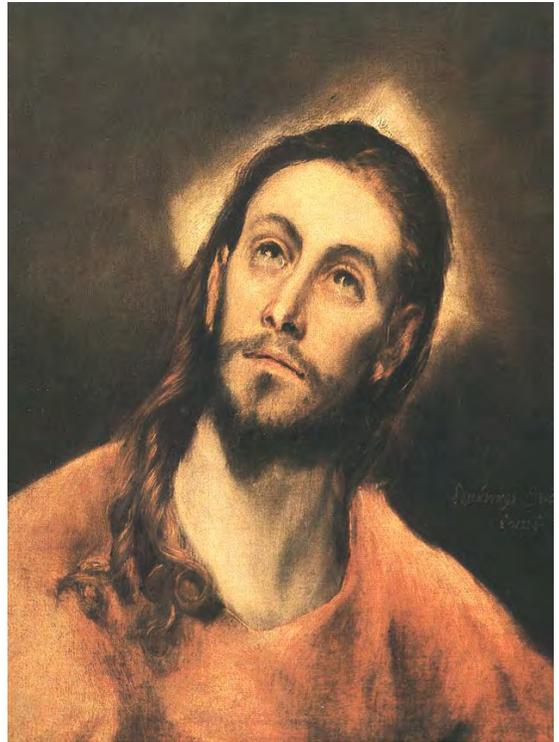
- Our resources section on the site: www.FranciscanAtHome.com/resources.
- Our annual [St. John Bosco Conference](#) and all Franciscan University's [other](#) summer conferences.
- Our ministry formation magazine – [The Catechetical Review](#).
- Our [events](#) regularly held for dioceses, local and on-line, our [tutorials and webinar series](#).
- Our University's online and on-ground [degrees](#) and [School of Spiritual Direction](#).
- Our intentional priority on formation for pastoral accompaniment, with workshops that help build you in that specific skill set, and the option to join the [Franciscan International Guild of Catechists and Leaders](#).

PROVE IT GOD!

By Amy Welborn

Assignment: Read this book over the next five months, and then answer the eight questions below. It is wise to familiarize yourself with the questions before reading the book, so you can be looking for your answers. As you read, if you need help with certain words or phrases, ask your parents to assist you. If need be, you may ask me.

Due Date: March Confirmation Session.



Christ, by El Greco, circa 1590-1595

Questions to be answered:

- 1) Why would God not make His existence more obvious? Answer this yourself, and then ask at least one of **your parents** this question, and write down the answer you get.
- 2) What does the word 'faith' mean? List at least five ways you can think of to *lose* faith. Answer this yourself, and then ask at least one of **your parents** this question, and write down the answer you get.
- 3) List at least five ways you can think of to *grow* in faith. Answer this yourself, and then ask at least one of **your parents** this question, and write down the answer you get.
- 4) What does the word 'truth' mean? What is the difference between 'truth' and 'opinion'?
- 5) What does the word 'freedom' mean? How does committing sin affect your freedom?
- 6) What is the purpose of suffering, or does it even have a purpose?
- 7) What is the purpose of the Church on earth? Why did Jesus found this Church?
- 8) What does the word 'holy' mean? How do holiness and happiness go together?

How to answer the questions:

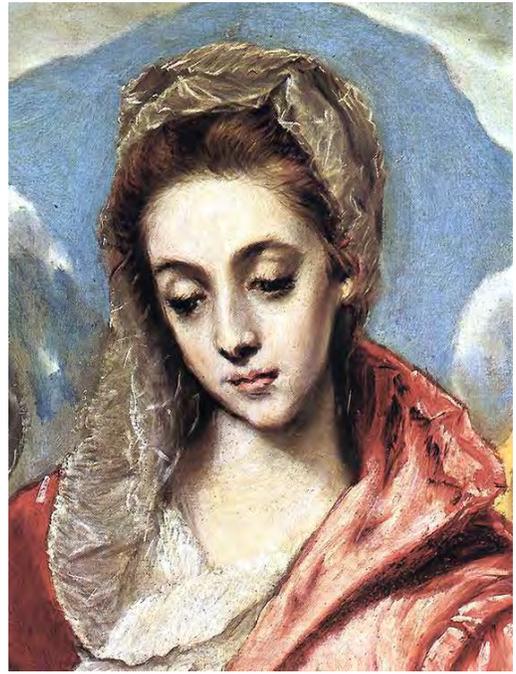
Length: Minimum of two pages of single-spaced text, maximum of five pages.

Typeface: 12 point font size, single-spaced; can be handwritten only if necessary.

Help: If you need help, this would be an excellent assignment to do with your parents.

PROVE IT PRAYER!

BY AMY WELBORN



The Virgin Mary, by El Greco, 1595

Assignment: Read this book over the next two months, and then answer the eight questions below. It is wise to familiarize yourself with the questions before reading the book, so you can be looking for your answers. As you read, if you need help with certain words or phrases, ask your parents to assist you. If need be, you may ask me.

Due Date: December Confirmation Session.

Questions to be answered:

- 1) Why would you bother to pray if God already knows what you need? Answer this question, and then ask at least one of **your parents** this question, and write down the answer you get.
- 2) List ten ways that God has shown His love for you in the last two months. Then, ask at least one of **your parents** to do the same, and write down the answer you get.
- 3) List five things that are distractions for you in prayer. Then, ask at least one of **your parents** to do the same, and write down the answer you get.
- 4) List five things that might help you overcome or remove those distractions.
- 5) What is the purpose of the Bible? What help can it be in trying to learn to pray?
- 6) What does it mean to 'pray'? How might prayer be necessary to a true Christian life?
- 7) What does it mean to find 'joy'? How does your relationship with God fit into that?
- 8) What does the word 'love' mean? How do prayer and love go together?

How to answer the questions:

Length: Minimum of two pages of single-spaced text, maximum of five pages.

Typeface: 12 point font size, single-spaced; can be handwritten only if necessary.

Help: If you need help, this would be an excellent assignment to do with your parents.

APRIL CONFIRMATION SESSION

◀ 7th Grade ▶

*One cannot be strong in prayer
and also continue to sin habitually.*

*Either he will give up prayer
or he will stop sinning.*

~ St. Alphonsus Liguori

- ✧ Read together the quote at the top of this page, and the two lists at the bottom. What is the value of prayer in your life? Parent and student together, list three ways that you could seek to develop your family's prayer life.
- ✧ Parent and student together, make a list of people who your family should be remembering to pray for in your lives. Who should be on that list always; who is most important on that list?
- ✧ Who do you know who is a prayer "warrior"? What makes them so? How can you follow their example?

The desire to PRAY grows from:

- + Desire to love.
- + Desire to grow.
- + Desire to hope.
- + Desire to need Him.
- + Desire to thank Him.
- + Desire to be joyful in Him.

The desire to PRAY dies from:

- ✖ Sin unaddressed.
- ✖ A thankless life.
- ✖ No model to follow.
- ✖ Lack of ability to listen.
- ✖ No docility or surrender.
- ✖ No friend to give an account to.
- ✖ Overly focused on trying to feel right.
- ✖ Overly focused on getting the words right.
- ✖ Unreflective life – no thought of your death.

To My Child

From: _____

All of us are called to encourage those younger than ourselves in the Christian way of life, especially our own children. It can help us focus on what is really essential in life. There are so many people in life who will do the opposite – discouraging our children on their path to Heaven. Here is a chance to speak to your child in the all-too-rare form of a letter, to encourage him or her on the long, hard, adventure through Satan’s hatred, back to our merciful Father. As a parent, then, answer these questions...

What are three things you hope for:

What are three things you have faith in about yourself:

What are three things you worry about:

What are three things you love and would like to share with others:

Now, having listed those things about yourself, below, write below a letter to your child including these as you see fit, and adding three things you would like to pray for at night with your child...

To My Child

From: _____

Your child is almost finished with his or her first year of preparation for becoming a fully-initiated Catholic. If made use of, the graces he or she will receive in the Sacrament of Confirmation are tremendously powerful.

As so many saints have found, particularly the child saints, when you unite your will to God's will, the sky's the limit, and deep joy is the signature fruit.

You most certainly desire joy for your child. Too often the world, and even those within the Church who are spiritually lazy, give such a bad witness to our sons and daughters, that they never even guess at how wonderful a fully-lived Christian life can be. There is often too much mediocrity and compromise around them, and too little spiritual courage and authenticity.

Well, here is one opportunity to set the standard, as only a parent can, for your hopes and your generous willingness to help your son or daughter rise up to God's invitation to joy, and strive to miss nothing of God's wonderful plan.

A litany of hopes for your second year of Confirmation preparation, and beyond...

I hope that I am able to help guide you...

I hope that I am able to help you to see...

I hope that I am able to help you to avoid...

I hope that I am able to help you to believe...

I hope that I am able to help you to think about...

I hope that I am able to help you to be...

My goals for my soul, as your parent, are...

My gravestone should read...

Jesus, thank you for...

Six Keys to Engaging Parents and Families in Parish Faith Formation

Authored by [Joseph D. White](#) in [Issue #2.3](#) of *The Catechetical Review*

The family has a privileged place in catechesis. The *Catechism* states that “parents receive the responsibility of evangelizing their children” and calls them the “first heralds” of the faith.^[i] The family is also called “domestic church”—the church of the home.^[ii] Catechesis in the parish can give structure and support to faith formation in the home. Parish catechesis is systematic and comprehensive, while the formation that parents provide is more organic and focused on particular occasions in the life of the family. Parents play an indispensable role in helping the faith come alive for their children. The family is the first place where each of us is called to live the faith that we have received.

Despite the important role of family in catechesis, many catechists and catechetical leaders find it a challenge to involve parents in parish faith formation programs. Here are six keys to engaging parents and families in catechesis:

1. Take time to listen to families.

Who are the families of the children or teens you serve? What are their challenges and struggles, their interests and priorities? Pope Francis states:

Today more than ever we need men and women who, on the basis of their experience of accompanying others, are familiar with processes which call for prudence, understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit, so that they can protect the sheep from wolves who would scatter the flock. We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur.^[iii]

One implication of these words is this: if we wish to evangelize the families of our parish, first we must listen to them. This means reaching out to families, sharing about ourselves, and expressing genuine interest in getting to know them. The time we make to do this will be some of the most valuable time spent in ministry with families.

2. Help families make connections between faith and family life.

We live in a highly secularized society—an environment that tells us that faith is something we practice at church on Sundays, not something we live in our everyday lives. This stands in sharp contrast to living as intentional disciples, for Jesus calls us to be the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Mt 5:13-14). In such a societal context, how can we begin to make the faith real for families we serve?

One place to begin is in the everyday moments of family life. In this year of mercy, we hear frequent mention of “works of mercy.” When parents of young children hear the Corporal Works of Mercy discussed, they might say to themselves, “I wish I had time to do these things, but I’m too busy with raising my children.” What they might not realize is that every day they are doing works of mercy as they minister to the needs of their family members. How many times have you, in your tasks as a parent, fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, or visited the sick? Parents do these things often for their children. It’s important that parents recognize this as mercy in action, especially because Jesus says, “as you did it to one of the least of these . . . , you did it to me” (Mt 25: 40). Every time a mother or father cares for their children, they have an opportunity to have an encounter with Jesus himself.

Provide families with resources for connecting everyday moments of family life more explicitly with their Catholic faith. In addition to practical ways to live out the lessons being learned in faith formation sessions throughout the week, give families resources such as family prayers for bedtime, blessings for times when family members leave the home each day, special blessings for milestones and family events, seasonal resources, and guides to creating a home altar or sacred space.

2. Foster a sense of community among families.

Families today often find it a challenge to come together due to busy schedules, conflicting priorities, and other practical issues; but making connections with our parish family is an essential aspect of what it means to be Catholic. Ours is not a solitary tradition of only an individual, personal relationship with God, but always encompasses a communal one, in which we celebrate and pray together as brothers and sisters. The Letter to the Hebrews admonishes us, “We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another” (Heb 10:25). Facilitating connections and building community between our families is one way we can help our families to appreciate the value of togetherness and build relationships that will last for years to come.

Consider hosting some sessions of faith formation for parents and children together, so parents can experience your sessions for themselves and are better able to reinforce the lessons at home. If possible, arrange some optional meetings for families outside of the regular sessions. Potluck dinners, class programs and plays, or attending a family movie as a group can be great ways to build community among the families in your parish. Seasonal gatherings for families can also be a fun way for families to learn and celebrate their faith together. They can take some preparation, so it might help to get families involved in the planning and setup as well.

4. Pay attention to the developmental stages of family life.

Consider how the faith formation program involves families at every stage. One period of family life that is often overlooked by parishes is the time between baptism and the school-age years. This is unfortunate, because families are restructuring during these early childrearing years—shifting priorities and routines as well as social circles as they adapt to the new realities of parenthood. If the parish is walking closely with families as they realign their priorities and social circles, this stage of family life might provide an opportunity for families to form a close bond with parishes that will last for years to come.

Adolescence is another stage of family life in need of particular focus. Research indicates that the parents of adolescents experience the highest levels of parenting stress, but parenting classes and groups are usually focused on parents of younger children. Forming Catholic conscience in teens is particularly challenging in today’s world. Parishes can increase the chances that teens will remain active and faithful Catholics by partnering with parents of adolescents and supporting them in this task.

5. Structure catechetical ministry for parent involvement.

The parish is not meant to take this responsibility of forming children in faith away from parents, but must support and equip parents by making catechesis organized and systematic and by giving parents the tools they need in order to be primary catechists. One way to communicate this clearly is to give parents a variety of ways to be involved in the parish catechetical program. Volunteer roles could include catechists and also catechetical assistants, teams to help with special events and projects, and volunteers from other ministries who can share their ministry with groups of children as appropriate.

6. Help families share their faith.

Every baptized person is called to be a missionary—to share Christ with others through word and action. The call to evangelization is directed towards us as individuals, towards the entire Church, and also towards our families—the domestic

Church. Parents are called to be evangelizers of their children. Children, too, learn to be missionaries as they share what they are learning with family members and others, and as they strive to be examples to peers and younger brothers and sisters.

Catechists help children share their faith by helping them articulate what they have learned. Still, knowing the faith is not enough. We must be witnesses in our families, our schools, parishes, and communities. In every catechetical session, always include some discussion of how to live what we have received. Roleplay good and moral decision-making exercises. Offer families ways to participate in service projects together. Provide parents with conversation starters they can use to talk about the faith with their children.

Involving parents in catechesis can be a difficult task, but it's too important to give up. Let us renew our efforts to engage whole families in learning about, *and* living out, their faith.

Dr. Joseph D. White is a National Catechetical Consultant for Our Sunday Visitor. He is a contributor to the Alive in Christ catechetical series and author of the booklet, Involving Parents, Engaging Families: Tested Tips for Catechists and Teachers.

Notes

[i] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2225.

[ii] *Ibid.*, par. 2224.

[iii] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, art. 171.

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