

## Opening Prayer

Dear Father,  
We ask you to send your Holy Spirit to be with us. Open our hearts and give us a great love for all the many families that we have been called to serve. Give us the wisdom to see the face of Jesus in each of them.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



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*"Ask your father and he will tell you."*  
A REPORT ON  
AMERICAN CATHOLIC  
RELIGIOUS PARENTING



*The crucial location where youth's religious outcomes are largely decided is not the congregation or the parish, but the home.*

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## Responding to the Data



- 1. Parents (especially fathers) should be informed of their role and empowered, not intimidated**
- 2. Parishes, clergy, and religious professionals are as necessary as ever**
- 3. [Catholic] cultural opportunities need to be available for the enhancement of Catholic family life**

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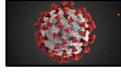
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### Fostering family faith formation as an overarching priority

- Church teachings and research data: the vital need for family-focused approaches.
- Archdiocese's 2015 pastoral plan: emphasized family catechesis and the need to engage families in the faith.



- COVID pandemic: Parishes in crisis mode. In the context of supporting and accompanying our frontline ministry leaders, new opportunities to encourage parish leaders to reimagine faith formation emerged.

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- Since families were in a sense “locked down” together, we wanted to affirm them in knowing that *Jesus is in their midst*, with them in their homes.
- We wanted to find a way to *accompany families* to make *prayer the center of their family life*.



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- Parishes needed an easy-to-use tool that focused on building a family's faith without burdening parents any more than they were already burdened.
- This was an opportunity to address what the research had revealed about what parents wanted from their church – to help them build their relationships within the families without adding to their already overflowing plates.
- At the same time, the new Directory for Catechesis was issued and gave great affirmation toward creative, evangelizing, family-based approaches in catechesis.



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### Arriving at a unified plan and implementation strategy

- In response to COVID and parish needs, our Office of Evangelization and Discipleship (OED):
  - Provided weekly virtual PCL meetings
  - Encouraged leaders to strategize creative ways to keep faith formation going
  - Concluded that we needed to provide more concrete options for parishes and families that were cost-free, hybrid and bilingual
- OED: a large office encompassing various ministry areas and a high degree of collaboration and openness. Importance of good working relationships and intentional collaboration, regardless of diocesan structure.



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- Steps toward *Families Forming Disciples*:
  - OED team brainstormed ideas which were focused on family faith formation that accompanied families and guided them as they lived out the liturgical year within their homes.
    - ◊ Modeling accompaniment with parish leaders, helping them model in turn with catechists.
  - Team members identified for FFD initiative: six colleagues across various ministry areas.
  - Process developed: Content development, edits, images, translation, catechists' training videos.
  - Initial rollout with PCLs and pastors: virtual sessions and communications.
  - Presentation/approval of archbishop and bishops for a three-year pilot.
  - Eventually met with Priests' Council and presented at various deanery meetings with pastors. (This is an ongoing need.)



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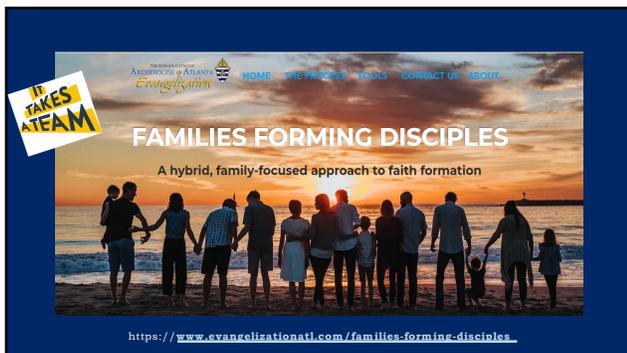
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**Role of the Catechist goes beyond Instructor...**

- **Facilitator/guide/spiritual companion (evangelizer) to families**
- **Creates a space for families to share/live the faith within their homes**
- **Provides opportunity for families to speak their faith!**
- **Activates prior knowledge**
- **Models learning**
- **Provides encouragement, assessment and adjusts**

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA

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Families need us to help them make a space within their homes to strengthen their relationship with God and with one another by facilitating and guiding:

**Four Keys to Practicing the Faith**

- Caring Conversations
- Family Devotions and Prayer
- Family Rituals and Traditions
- Family Service
- *Positive Parent-Child Relationships*

Source: Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation, by John Roberto, LiturgyFaith Associates, 2010, pp. 135-136

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**Family Faith Formation Parishes in Archdiocese of Atlanta**

<b>FFD*</b>	
<b>20</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>
<b>15-20</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>
<b>Parishes implementing other formal family programs</b>	
<b>20</b>	<b>2020-present</b>

\*FFD accessed on the website in 47 states and 17 other countries

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA

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*I have heard that **fathers, in particular, have benefited** by having a more natural way to speak to their children about the faith because the program facilitates organic discussion. Pastor*

*I have been blown away by the impact it has had on their families. For instance, my 4 year old niece calls me on the phone and is able to tell me what is going on in the Sunday Gospel! My oldest niece was delighted to share with me their family prayer altar. Seminarian*

*Families sharing faith together, more dads involved. I have that parents can hear their kids talk about faith and pray together, and same for kids to hear their parents. PCI.*

*The lessons are developmentally appropriate, follow our liturgical calendar (which aligns easily for our families), and are very well organized. Plus, the fact that the lessons are provided in both English & Spanish helps us meet the needs of our diverse multicultural population. PCI.*

*We have seen a much higher involvement between the children and the parents. Such a blessing! ... I pray we do (continue family faith formation next year); the interactions I have seen are tremendous! It also allows the catechists to spend time with their own families, this has been a hurdle for several of my catechists in the past... PCI.*



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### Family Survey Feedback

- It has brought more talk about Jesus and our faith to everyday conversations at home.
- Allowing us to be closer to each other and learning new things about our faith and God.
- Praying more together and talking through the children's learnings more.
- Kept us engaged in our faith, reminded us that there are always better days ahead.
- We've had to make a focused effort, "Family Plan" for Lent, Advent, the Easter Season. It helped us make our faith a priority and daily activity during those seasons.
- It gave me a chance to share my faith with the kids and for them to be more engaged with how we celebrate religious holidays at home.
- We got to choose what we wanted to put on our altar and we got to add pictures of our loved ones with other meaningful pieces of our faith.
- FFD has helped us to talk about God more often and more openly in the home. There is still much room for improvement. It is funny how even when "walking in faith" we can keep to ourselves in these matters outside of Sunday and church oriented events. FFD has helped to keep me and my family more aligned with our true purpose, to pray and think about this on a more regular basis.



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### Biggest Challenges as a Diocesan Team

- **Communication:** A constant challenge because making such a significant shift requires perseverance and a long view! It's a campaign, so you have to keep working at getting out the message.
- **The Unknowns of Newness and Change:** Many in parish leadership may be familiar with the reasons why family approaches are important, but still may not be willing to pivot to something new, for various reasons. Some may feel strongly that their traditional model is working for them. (In that case, we haven't told parishes to stop what they are doing but rather to consider how they might engage families more ... to take a next step.)
- **Lack of Readiness:** Sometimes parishes may change to a family format before having the necessary structures in place.



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**Best practices in moving towards family-based formation**

- Intentional accompaniment of PCLs
- Support of the bishops and pastors
- Learning what families (and leaders) want/need – survey
- Emphasizing the importance of family formation in the diocese: e.g., designated Ministry Lead for Family Catechesis and Curriculum
- Professional development for parish leaders




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**The Peyton Institute for Domestic Church Life**

HOLY CROSS FAMILY MINISTRIES

- **Renewing Catholic Family Life Webinar Series**
  - Professional development opportunity that complements the AoA's vision for all parishes.
  - Financially supported over 50 PCLs/YMs in attending.
- **Family Track – Eucharistic Congress: Catholic HOM (Households on Mission)** in partnership with Peyton Institute




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**Best practices continued...**

- Networking with PCLs: bringing them together to learn and share
- No one model or silver bullet: Parishes are very diverse so it is important to offer a great variety of ways to engage families.
- The value of piloting an initiative:
  - Helpful way to invite interested parishes on board, to learn from them and improve, and to spread the word to other parishes—without forcing parishes that may not be ready.
  - Gives dioceses, bishops, pastors, leaders, etc., flexibility, with an understanding that we are going to take time to learn from this—to build in time to evaluate, adjust, and grow.
- The priority of evangelization and evangelizing catechesis as a key context:
  - The 2020 Directory is very strong on this point.
  - The vital role of the family in the mission of evangelization (and catechesis).
  - Office name change: from OFD to OED (“formation” to “evangelization”).




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