



# Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents,  
especially those  
with small children.

*By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are through the witness of their lives  
the first heralds of the Gospel for their children.*

~Familiaris Consortio #39



**T**he family is the first place children are introduced to Jesus.

While children cannot grasp the fullness of faith at an early age, they can develop habits that will grow into understanding later. Children begin cultivating these habits by observing the habits of their parents. Children take their first steps of faith by following the walk of their parents.

As you have already learned, the Church considers the role of the family in the faith formation of children so important that it calls the family the “Domestic Church.” It is the first and the main place that children experience the love of God, learn about their faith, and learn to put their faith into practice.

Parents who honor their role in faith formation immerse their children in a Christ-filled environment before they even have them baptized as babies. And, as the children grow, faithful parents strive to become more conscious and deliberate in their efforts. They start with the basics and continue to build upon them.

Faithful parents make Sunday holy. They celebrate the Eucharist at Mass each and every week. They reinforce the special grace of Sunday by spending time with their family and others who understand the need to rest in the Lord. Parents who want their domestic church to be strong slow life down on Sunday. They make the Lord’s Day holy with special events like an out-of-the-ordinary meal, extra time spent in conversation or recreation, prayer together or reflection on God’s abundant goodness.

Faithful parents understand that their children’s faith development starts in the home. While Catholic school, parish catechetical programs and sacramental preparation all play a role in the faith development of

children, they can never replace the significance of what is caught by the family within the domestic church. There is an old saying that is very true, “The faith is first caught before it is taught.” Children “catch the faith” within the family. There are really three steps to sharing your faith with your children:

1. Modeling your faith: let your children see you pray, grow in virtue, practice devotion, read the Bible, attend Mass, participate in the Sacraments and fellowship with other Catholics.
2. Practice the faith as a family: invite your children to do these things with you, and eventually encourage them to take leadership roles within the family’s practice of faith, such as leading prayer or planning service projects.
3. Expand the faith with your children: don’t assume that Catholic schools and parish catechism classes are going to do this for you. They are only a piece of the puzzle. Find ways to make learning about the faith fun – research saints together, have theological discussions around the dinner table and look up what the Church teaches on whatever issue you’re discussing or play Catechism and Bible board games, quiz games and computer games. Read bible stories using your family bible. Ask questions about the Catholic faith and find the answers in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. (Available on line at [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).)

Sometimes parents get nervous about the idea that they are responsible for developing faith in their children. Parents often feel ill-equipped, despite their strong desire to love and serve God. Fortunately, help is available from the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the form of practical prayer advice. Let’s examine this advice and lay out a path to getting started with family prayer.

# From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

The goal of fostering faith is a life of \_\_\_\_\_.

Three expressions of prayer include:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Christian prayer should do the following five things.

1. Acknowledge that we must rely on God for He is great. This is called \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Ask God for goodness for ourselves. This is called \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Ask God for goodness for others. This is called \_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ recognizes God for what He gives us.  
This is best reflected in the Eucharist.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ focuses our heart on God.  
\_\_\_\_\_ is a prayerful dedication to the faith.  
\_\_\_\_\_ a physical environment in your home.

## Continue the Discussion

**Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.**

1. What prayers did you learn as a child that you continue to say today? Which of these prayers have you taught your children?
2. What times of the day does your family pray together or could your family pray together? Share any prayer time rituals that you know of or currently practice with the group. (ex. meal, bedtime, morning...)
3. How do you model your faith to your children? What do they see you do?
4. Which of the five prayer components mentioned in the DVD (adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, praise) is most comfortable for you? Which is the hardest? Explain your answers.
5. The third commandment asks us to keep holy the Lord's Day. How can a family do this? Why should a family keep the Lord's Day holy?

# Make a Plan

Fostering faith requires an individual commitment to joyfully know, love and serve God. Below are seven practices that can help you become more faithful and bring your family closer to God. Each practice includes realistic ideas that lead to deeper expressions of faith. Read through all the categories. Then choose at least three of the seven practices to incorporate into your life. Use the space on the next page to record the faith practices that you have chosen. For current resources on any of these categories, go to [www.twl4parents.com](http://www.twl4parents.com). Click on the Parenting Resources tab.

## 1. Study the Faith.

Ask questions and find answers. Everyone has questions about their faith. The challenge is finding answers that bear the truth. Consider self study of the faith with reliable resources like the Catechism of the Catholic Church or group study offered in your parish.

## 2. Read the Bible.

Spend time each week reading bible verses. One of the easiest ways to do this is to read the passages from the daily liturgy. These can be found on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website; [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org). Click on daily readings. You may also choose to place your bible near your favorite chair or on your night stand and spend a few minutes each day reading one of your favorite books or gospels.

## 3. Practice a Devotion.

Learn a particular devotion that reflects something special to your family: devotion to the Holy Family, to the Sacred Heart, to the Divine Mercy, or to a particular saint is a great place to start.

## 4. Celebrate your Faith.

Find resources that would help your family celebrate your faith. For example, *Faith and Family* magazine offers craft ideas and recipes for important feast days, saint days and liturgical themes for each month. There are also many books that offer ways for families to celebrate the faith in fun, creative ways.

## 5. Choose a Patron Saint for your Family and its Members.

The Catholic faith recognizes numerous persons in heaven who lived lives of great charity and heroism here on earth. Saints can pray for us as we strive to become more holy.

## 6. Reveal your Faith.

Choose a prominent place in your house that you could hang a crucifix. What other forms of sacred art could you find to enhance the atmosphere of your domestic Church?

## 7. Expand your Family Prayer Life.

Teach your children one basic prayer each month.

## 8. Challenge Yourself.

Several prayers are printed on the next page. Memorize them and add them to the prayers you offer each day.

Strong and faithful God,  
Keep my children safe from injury and harm.  
Make them blessings to all they meet today. Amen.

God of mercy and grace,  
Guide me to be the first and best educator for my children.  
Help me to do Your will. Amen.

May the Lord Jesus,  
who lived with his holy family in Nazareth,  
dwell also with our family,  
keep it from all evil,  
and make us one in heart and mind. Amen.

Loving God, be close to us  
as we pray in love and do your will.  
You are our God, nourishing us forever and ever. Amen.

The three faith practices that I commit to integrating into my personal life are:

1.

2.

3.

Imprimatur: †Most Rev. William P. Cullahan, OFM Conv.  
Bishop of LaCrosse  
14 December 2011

Published by AJ Heinzen and Associates.  
All Rights Reserved.

***No part of this publication may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher.***

Visit [www.twl4parents.com](http://www.twl4parents.com) for more practical parenting ideas.