What’s Working in Parent and Family Faith Formation in the Parish Community!

Patrice Spirou, M.A., Family Catechesis & Curriculum, pspirou@archatl.com
What do FAMILIES really need from us NOW?
Most parents today are either Generation Xers or Millennials (Generation Z).

Research shows that these age groups are increasingly leaving the Church and becoming referred to as “lost generations”.

Those that are leaving are taking their children with them.
The Data Shows that Young people faithfully “mirror” the religious lives of their parents. Family is the key to Parish Renewal and the future of the Church.
Think about your own experience

What impact did your parents or grandparents have on your faith formation?
The crucial location where youth’s religious outcomes are largely decided is not the congregation or the parish, but the home. (2017)
What parents *Don’t* want:

- To volunteer
- More homework

What parents *Do* want:

Help strengthening the relationships within their families
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
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.
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.
Parish catechesis: challenges

• Limited **parent and family** engagement and connection to the parish

• **Parents as primary educators?**
  • “Domestic Church” unknown to many families
  • Many parents don’t feel competent to pass on their faith
  • A culture or “code of silence” when it comes to sharing about Jesus/faith
Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), no. 288:

“It is essential that children actually see that, for their parents, prayer is something truly important. Hence moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon.”
FAMILIES NEED US TO:

• Engage them in renewed ways
• Empower parents as primary educators
• Walk with them as part of their spiritual family
• Help them build their relationships with one another
• Foster prayer in their homes
• Refocus on the goal of faith formation: Jesus!
Best practices in moving towards family-based formation

- Intentional accompaniment of PCLs - regular virtual meetings, retreats, FFF panels
- 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
- PCL Orientation integration
- Deanery meetings
- Families Forming Disciples
FAMILIES FORMING DISCIPLES

A hybrid, family-focused approach to faith formation

https://www.evangelizationatl.com/families-forming-disciples
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
- Caring Conversations
- Family Devotions and Prayer
- Family Rituals and Traditions
- Family Service
- Strong Family Relationships

Lifelongfaith.com
Family Faith Formation Parishes in Archdiocese of Atlanta

**FFD**

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Parishes implementing other formal family programs

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

*Website traffic increased to over 1000 visits per 30 day interval
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.
I have heard that fathers, in particular, have benefitted 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 love that parents can hear their kids talk about faith and pray together, and same for kids to hear their parents.  PCL

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.  PCL

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…  PCL
Let’s Brainstorm ways to transform “Religious Ed REQUIREMENTS” into FAMILY FAITH EXPERIENCES!

"I'm not here for committing a crime — I'm here for failing to comply with a guideline."
Getting Our Feet Wet!
At-Home Rituals

• Traveling Mary with rosary & pamphlet
• Liturgical Calendar Kits
• Quizzes with questions and answers
• Journaling with questions & pictures to bring back to class and share
Who in your life has taught you the most about God? Why?

Who is your favorite saint? Why?

What do you remember about your First Holy Communion, Reconciliation or Confirmation?

Who is your favorite Old Testament hero?

What do you want for your child as he/she receives the sacrament?
Wading In!!
Integrating Parents
Full Immersion!!!
There’s no better time than now…

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 33
Family Resources!

www.evangelization.com
Thank You!