

Tips for Family Prayer

Sacred Space: A Place for Prayer

Create a small prayer space in a corner of your family room. Place on it a crucifix, bible, candle, and an image of Mary. Change the colour of the altar cloth to match the liturgical season, eg purple for Advent & Lent, white for Easter & Christmas, green for Ordinary Time & red for Pentecost.

Plan – the best time of day, best place, best way of involving all.

Constancy – stick with the pattern that works.

Age appropriate – encourage responsibility in older children for younger ones, give younger ones roles they can play.

Symbols – candle, family bible, icon, crucifix, photo of someone being prayed for – whatever works best for your family.

Regular pattern – eg 'Thank You', 'Sorry' and 'Please Help Me' prayers. Traditional prayers (explain their origins, meaning).

Meal Time is Prime Family Time

Meal time is a major time for sharing, recalling family and faith memories and developing values. Making a priority of family meals pays huge dividends, even if it can only be achieved part of the time. Plan the time (avoid 'phone calls, competing TV programmes, etc); plan the 'conversation' (what will help involve everyone tonight?); encourage all to have their say, no matter how young or old; avoid sources of tension wherever possible (humour is a great 'circuit-breaker'). And always start with a prayer. This is a major liturgy of the 'domestic church'.

"Faith is caught more than taught"

this idea used to be told to children.



Family Passing on the Faith

Guess who's watching you now!

As we begin as a diocese and community of faith to plan for a future in hope it is worth remembering that our faith and our core values are passed on primarily in the home. TV advertisements for responsible drinking often end up with the reminder 'Your children are watching you'. And if a child's behaviour at school is particularly difficult, who does the school call in to enlist help? The parents, of course! Most parents are not trained teachers but, for better or for worse, they are the prime nurturers in faith of their children.

"Worry not that your children don't listen to you. Worry that they watch you."

So is it time for some 'In-service training'?

A major way in which we nurture our children's faith is by letting them see how ours is lived out in daily life. So it's always good to reflect on where we can brush up our own faith life and make it more relevant and attractive to our children. As parents, we can't underestimate or underplay the importance of our role, our influence, our own experience and our responsibility. *Some might say that this goes without saying.* Religion begins at home. Parents are the first religion teachers and the most important of all teachers of religion. Maybe, this is the best place to start.

This leaflet presents a collection of ideas that different families found worked for them.



"Love is shown by little things, by attention to small daily signs which make us feel at home. Faith grows when it is lived and shaped by love. That is why our families, our homes, are true domestic churches. They are the right place for faith to become life, and life to grow in faith."
(Pope Francis)

Good Behaviour Patterns

All of us need to rethink our patterns of behaviour as we go through life. If you wrote your own list of *Good Habits of Effective Catholic Parents*, what would it be? Examples might include:

- 1. Talk naturally about God.** Sprinkle the conversation with comments such as “Thank you Lord” (when something good happens) or “Praise God!” (on seeing a beautiful sunset), “God willing” (as we talk of our plans), “God bless you” (when saying goodbye).
- 2. Show practical concern for others.** The Church’s *Option for the Poor* begins with us. Be quick to respond to someone in need and, if possible, engage the rest of the family in the response.
- 3. Praise the Church!**
“Often after Mass we would criticise the singing, the homily, or an annoying parishioner. Then our kids started to complain about going to Mass: ‘All you do is complain about it. So why should we go?’ It made us realize that our negativity undermined our children’s faith and did not reflect our deep love for the Church.”
- 4. Encourage questioning.** Questions about faith are opportunities to enter into their world of discovery and help us to discover more about our own faith. When you are not sure of the answer, show your willingness to learn more about it yourself.
- 5. Pray.** Pray often. Pray with confidence. Our prayers are always answered, though not always in the way we immediately expect.

Choose Your Friends

It makes sense to cultivate good friends with common values. They become significant other adults in the lives of our children. As relatable role models, they give credibility from a different perspective to all that we try to teach. Think about arranging to go to the same Mass together and maybe going to the beach or a BBQ afterwards. In this way, other families can become like extended family and bring healthy fun into our lives.

“One thing I always remember about my father was that he always knelt by his bed before he went to sleep and said his prayers. It left a deep impression on me.”



Family Rituals

Family rituals are repetitive family activities that distinguish our particular family and often reflect some of our deepest desires. For example:

Blessing

We deeply desire that God will bless our children and look after them. As we help them snuggle into bed at night we can kiss them or make a sign of the cross on their forehead and say something like, “May God bless you and keep you safe always.”

Give thanks

“In one family I know, the father often can’t get home until after dinner but then the family gets together and each person shares one thing that happened that day for which they can thank God.”

Family prayer list

There is always someone we know in special need of prayers. The ritual of lighting a candle for them each evening acts as a simple reminder to pray for them and helps involve others.

Make Sunday special

Go to Mass as a family, preferably a Mass attended by other families. Explain what is happening to little children. Afterwards enjoy a simple treat or outing together and discuss the readings or homily with older children. Avoid cramming the day with activities.

“My husband is not a Catholic, and it is difficult to get the kids up to Mass each Sunday. Being involved in running the Children’s Liturgy has helped. To my surprise, my own children have taken an interest and help out. Also, it gives me extra motivation to be there”.

Celebrate Feast Days

The saints are our *heroes in faith*. Identify a saint for each family member – preferably their Christian name or their Confirmation name. Discuss how that saint’s particular virtues can be lived today. Retell the story of their saint’s life (see www.catholic.org/saints). Mark the feast day in the calendar.

Read Scripture

Invest in a family bible if you don’t own one. Read it together and see what God might be saying to you. Use it at family gatherings. By reading stories from Scripture, we all can learn more about the words and actions of who Jesus is.

Kids toys, books, music

Just as some games and toys can encourage violence or premature sexualisation of children, others can encourage their faith, eg colourful bible stories we can read to our children, songs that promote faith values.



Grandparents

Many grandparents provide the gift of time, so valuable in the frenetic pace of today. Also, they are the ‘central bank of memories’ for the family and can give special insights into faith practice. Just their physical presence, especially at Mass, gives a strong sense of continuity.