

FAMILY CATECHESIS – WHY PARENTS MATTER!

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, Creator of all things,
you call me to be in relationship with you and those I encounter.

Thank you for calling me to be a catechist,
for the opportunity to share what you have given to me.

May all those with whom I share the gift of faith
discover how you are present in all things.

May they come to know you, whom we dare to call our Father,
and your son, Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

May the grace of the Holy Spirit guide my heart and lips,
so that I may remain constant in loving and praising you.

May I be a witness to the Gospel
and may all my words and actions reflect your love.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

TWO QUESTIONS...

In your parish, in the Sacramental programmes you are involved in:

What is the role of the Catechists?

What is the role of the Parents?

Just jot down now what these are, and keep for later.

WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TELL US ABOUT THE FAMILY?

We are made for relationship:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply'. *Genesis 1:27,28*

God spoke to his chosen people through Moses:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. *Deuteronomy 6:5*

Then he goes on to say:

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

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Then he goes on to say:

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

During a time of great trial, our psalmist demands a hearing, speaking clearly on the role of parents:

Give ear, my people to my teaching,
incline your ear to the words of my mouth...

The things we have heard and understood,
The things our fathers have told us,
These things we will not hide from their children
but will tell them to the next generation:
The glories of the LORD and his might,
And the marvellous deeds he has done...

To our fathers he gave a command
to make it known to their children,
that the next generation might know it,

the children yet to be born.
They should arise and declare it to their children,
that they should set their hope in God
and never forget God's deeds.
Psalm 78: 1, 3-7

St Paul writes to Timothy on the role of family:

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.
2 Timothy 1:5-7

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TELL US ABOUT THE ROLE OF PARENTS?

...since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. **Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it.** *Familiaris Consortio 36 & Gravissimum Educationis 3*

On account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children [which] is irreplaceable and inalienable, ... **the educational role of parents is therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others.** *Familiaris Consortio 36*

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Education is thus a unique process for which the mutual communion of persons has immense importance. *The educator is a person who "begets" [brings about] in a spiritual sense. From this point of view, raising children can be considered a genuine apostolate. [an apostolate is a Christian organisation directed to serving and evangelising the world']* It is a living means of communication, which not only creates a profound relationship between the educator and the one being educated, but also makes them both sharers in truth and love, that final goal to which everyone is called by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." *St Pope John Paul II's Letter to Families (1994)*

WHAT DOES THE FAMILY TELL US ABOUT THE CHURCH?

From you, first and foremost, they must learn to distinguish right from wrong and to choose good over evil. I appeal to you: do not deprive your children of their rightful human and spiritual heritage. Teach them about God, and tell them about Jesus, about his love and his Gospel. Teach them to love God and respect his commandments in the sure knowledge that they are his children above all. Teach them to pray. Teach them to be mature and responsible human beings, and honest citizens of their country. This is a stupendous privilege, a grave duty, and a wonderful task that you have received from God. By the witness of your own Christian lives, you lead your children to take their rightful place in the Church of Christ. Para 10

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19861130_perth-australia.html

The innate bond of love between parent and child is integral to a child's faith formation

....the most basic element, so basic that it qualifies the educational role of parents, is parental love, which finds fulfilment in the task of education...

...as well as being a source, the parents' love is also the animating principle and therefore the norm inspiring and guiding all concrete educational activity..."

Familiaris Consortio 36

3. "The family is the domestic church". The meaning of this traditional Christian idea is that the home is the Church in miniature. The Church is the sacrament of God's love. She is a communion of faith and life. She is a mother and teacher. She is at the service of the whole human family as it goes forward towards its ultimate destiny. In the same way the family is a community of life and love. It educates and leads its members to their full human maturity and it serves the good of all along the road of life. The family is the "first and vital cell of society". In its own way it is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. The future of the world and of the Church, therefore, passes through the family.

4. As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live.

Apostolic Pilgrimage to Bangladesh, Singapore, Fiji Islands, New Zealand, Australia and Seychelles, Homily of John Paul II, Perth (Australia), 30 November 1986

Since it is in the home where children first experience love, the very essence of God himself, it follows that **'family catechesis therefore precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis'**

Catechesi Tradendae 68

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TELL US ABOUT THE FAMILY?

For Christian parents have the mission to educate, a mission rooted, as we have said, in their participation in God's creating activity, has a new specific source in the sacrament of marriage, which consecrates them for the strictly Christian education of their children. Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for 'an effort at evangelisation and catechesis inside the family'. *Directory for Catechesis* 124

PARENTS AS EVANGELISERS AND CATECHISTS?

Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. They are the 'first heralds' and 'should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church'. *CCC* 2225

How do we meet them with 'approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental'.

Evangelii Gaudium 165

'Do you know that Jesus Christ loves you; he gave His life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.' *EG* 164

DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS

Directory for Catechesis

Chapter III The Catechist

Parents, active participants in catechesis

124. "For Christian parents the mission to educate, a mission rooted, as we have said, in their participation in God's creating activity, has a new specific source in the sacrament of marriage, which consecrates them for the strictly Christian education of their children."¹¹ Believing parents, with their daily example of life, have the most effective capacity to transmit the beauty of the Christian faith to their children. "Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for 'an effort at evangelisation and catechesis inside the family.'"¹² The greatest challenge in this situation is for couples, mothers and fathers, active participants in catechesis, to overcome the mentality of delegation that is so common, according to which the faith is set aside for specialists in religious education. This mentality is, at times, fostered by communities that struggle to

organise family centred catechesis which starts from the families themselves. “The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfilment of their educational mission”¹³ to become above all the first catechists of their own children.

11 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22nd November 1981), 38

12 AL 200

13 AL 85

Chapter VIII

Catechesis in the Lives of Persons

1. CATECHESIS AND THE FAMILY

226. The family is a community of love and of life, made up of “a complex of interpersonal relationships ... - married life, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation and fraternity - through which each human person is introduced into the ‘human family’ and into the ‘family of God,’ which is the Church”¹⁴. The future of persons and of the human and ecclesial communities depends to a large extent on the family, the basic cell of society. Thanks to the family, the Church becomes a *family of families* and is enriched with the life of these domestic churches. Therefore, “with inner joy and deep comfort, the Church looks to the families who remain faithful to the teachings of the Gospel, encouraging them and thanking them for the testimony they offer. For they bear witness, in a credible way, to the beauty of marriage as indissoluble and perpetually faithful”¹⁵.

Areas of family catechesis

Catechesis in the family

227. *The family is a proclamation of faith* in that it is the natural place in which faith can be lived in a simple and spontaneous manner. It “has an unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values. On this human base, Christian initiation is more profound: the awakening of the sense of God; the first steps in prayer; education of the moral conscience; formation in the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God the Father, the Creator. It is, indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going and daily than structured into periods”¹⁶.

228. Conjugal and family life, lived according to God’s plan, constitutes in itself a Gospel in which God’s gratuitous and patient love for humanity can be read. By virtue of the sacrament of marriage, Christian spouses participate in the mystery of unity and of fruitful love that exists between Christ and the Church. *Catechesis in the family* therefore has the task

of revealing to those who take part in family life, above all to the spouses and parents, the gift that God gives to them through the sacrament of marriage.

Catechesis with the family

229. *The Church proclaims the Gospel to the family.* The Christian community is a *family of families* and is itself the family of God. Community and family are, each for the other, a constant and reciprocal point of reference: while the community receives from the family an understanding of the faith that is immediate and connected in a natural way to the affairs of life, the family in turn receives from the community an explicit key for using faith to reinterpret its experience. Aware of this profound connection, the Church, in her devotion to evangelisation, proclaims the Gospel to families, showing them by experience that this is “joy that ‘fills hearts and lives’, because in Christ we have been ‘set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness”¹⁷.

230. At the present time, *catechesis with families* is permeated by the *kerygma*, because even “in and among families, the Gospel message should always resound; the core of that message, the *kerygma*, is what is most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. This message has to occupy the centre of all evangelising activity”¹⁸. Moreover, in the dynamic of missionary conversion catechesis with families is characterised by a style of humble understanding and by a proclamation that is concrete, not theoretical and detached from personal problems. The community, in its efforts to bring evangelisation and catechesis into families, marks out paths of faith that should help them to have a clear awareness of their own identity and mission: it therefore accompanies and supports them in their task of transmitting life, helps them in the exercise of their inherent duty of education, and promotes an authentic family spirituality. In this way the family is made aware of its role and becomes, in the community and along with it, an active participant in the work of evangelisation.

The catechesis of the family.

231. *The family proclaims the Gospel.* As a domestic church founded on the sacrament of marriage that also has a missionary dimension, the Christian family takes part in the Church’s mission of evangelisation and is therefore an agent of catechesis. “The work of handing on the faith to children, in the sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole family in its evangelising mission. It naturally begins to spread the faith to all around them, even outside of the family circle”¹⁹. In addition to its natural service of child-rearing, the family is therefore called to contribute to building up the Christian community and to bear witness to the Gospel in society. “The ministry of evangelisation and catechesis of the Church of the home is rooted in and derives from the one mission of the Church and is ordained to the upbuilding of the one Body of Christ, it must remain in inti-

mate communion and collaborate responsibly with all the other evangelising and catechetical activities present and at work in the ecclesial community at the diocesan and parochial levels.”²⁰ The *catechesis of the family* is therefore every specific contribution that Christian families make, with the sensibility proper to them, to the various journeys of faith that the community proposes.

13 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (4th March 1979), 13.

14 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22nd November 1981), 15.

15 AL 86.

16 GDC 255.

17 AL 200; cf also EG 1.

18 AL 58; cf see EG 35 and 164.

19 AL 289.

20 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22nd November 1981), 53.



Agency for Evangelisation
and Catechesis
ARCHDIOCESE *of* SOUTHWARK