



NCCL

Certificate

IN THE PRACTICE OF CATECHESIS

A Guide to Designing Family Catechesis

Reading: Chapter 3 in *Guided by the Directory for Catechesis*

Part 1. Listening to Families: Insights from Research

1. National Profile of Parents: CARA Research 2024

(1,533 self-identified Catholics, expecting or have a child 0-18 years old)

Parents' View of their Parenting

Rating their job as a parent:

- 36% - Excellent
- 44% - Very good
- 17% - Good
- 2% - Only fair
- 1% - Poor

Importance of being a parent to who they are as a person:

- 61% - Most important
- 33% - One of the most important
- 5% - Important but not one of the most important aspects
- 1% - Not too important an aspect

Parents' Religiosity and Practice

Viewing themselves religiously:

- Active believer involved in a parish community: 36%
- Believer, occasionally involved in a parish community: 44%
- Inactive believer, not involved in a parish community: 17%
- Inactive nonbeliever: 4%

Importance of the Catholic faith

- 16% - The most important part of your life
- 33% - Among the most important parts of your life
- 34% - Important but so are many other areas of your life
- 11% - Not too important in your life
- 6% - Not important in your life at all

A total of 49% say their faith is “among the most important” or “the most important” part(s) of their lives.

Parents’ Mass Attendance

- 9% - More than once a week
- 22% - Every week
- 14% - Almost every week
- 16% - Once or twice a month
- 20% - A few times a year
- 17% - Rarely or never attend Mass

Family Faith Practices

Parents said that the following are the top ten practices that their families engage in:

1. Eating together as a family
2. Having family conversations about faith
3. Providing moral instruction
4. Praying as a family (mealtime, bedtime)
5. Celebrating the church year seasons at church (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter)
6. Praying as a family during times of struggle or crisis
7. Talking about faith or spirituality as a family
8. Participating in Sunday Mass as a family
9. Encouraging teens to pray alone or with peers
10. Serving people in need as a family

Parent Practices

Parents said that they do these practices “very much”:

1. Encouraging children/teens to pursue their talents and interests
2. Cultivating a warm, compassionate, and loving relationship with their children/teens
3. Engaging in positive communication with their children/teens
4. Demonstrating a warm and affirming parenting approach with their children/teens
5. Spending one-on-one time with their children/teens
6. Engaging their children/teens in family conversations
7. Providing moral and values formation
8. Asking for forgiveness when they are wrong or mess up
9. Balancing religious firmness (this is what we belief and how we live) with religious flexibility (not forcing faith, but inviting and exploring), and respecting my child’s/teen’s views
10. Engaging children/teens in family conversations about faith and religious matters
11. Practice their faith and sharing it with their children/teens
12. Participating with their children/teens in activities, such as service projects and parish programs

Parent Perception of Children’s Enthusiasm about Being Catholic

The following family practices were statistically significant predictors of a parent saying their child was reacting enthusiastic/positive about being Catholic. **The more frequently a family does these things the more likely their children are responding positively to being raised Catholic.**

- Reading the Bible as a family
- Encouraging children/teens to read the Bible alone or with their peers

- Reading the Bible as an adult
- Talking about faith and spirituality as a family
- Celebrating rituals and sacraments at church as a family

A parent who said their family “regularly” talks about faith and spirituality together is more than four times likely than a parent who said their family “never” does this to say their child is positive about being Catholic than not enthusiastic/negative. Similar probabilities are associated with

- celebrating rituals and sacraments at church as a family
- reading the Bible as a family
- encouraging children/teens to read the Bible alone or with their peers

2. Profile of 8,000+ Parents in the Catholic Family Project

(Compilation of results from parishes in 18 participating dioceses and over 8,000 parent surveys.)

Family Faith Practices – Most Frequent Practices

Parents said that the following are the practices their families engage in frequently. (On a 5 point scale, all of these items were 3.40 or higher – meaning they are practiced frequently or regularly.)

- Having family conversations
- Eating together as a family
- Providing moral instruction
- Praying myself as an adult
- Celebrating the church year seasons at church (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter)
- Celebrating rituals and sacraments at church as a family
- Talking about your (parent) faith and religious tradition with children and teens
- Talking about faith or spirituality as a family
- Participating in Sunday Mass as a family
- Praying as a family (mealtime, bedtime)
- Praying as a family during times of struggle or crisis

Parent Practices – Most Frequent Practices

Parents said that they do these practices “very much.” (On a 4 point scale, all of these items were 3.25 or higher – meaning they are practiced much or very much.)

- Encouraging children/teens to pursue their talents and interests
- Cultivating a warm, compassionate, and loving relationship with their children/teens
- Engaging their children/teens in family conversations
- Engaging in positive communication with their children/teens
- Providing moral and values formation
- Demonstrating a warm and affirming parenting approach with their children/teens
- Spending one-on-one time with their children/teens
- Asking for forgiveness when they are wrong or mess up
- Practicing their faith and sharing it with their children/teens
- Balancing religious firmness (this is what we believe and how we live) with religious flexibility (not forcing faith, but inviting and exploring), and respecting my child’s/teen’s views
- Talking about my own faith with my children/teens

Interest in Parent Enrichment – Top Interests

At least 40% of all parents said they were very interested in these topics:

- Discussing tough topics with my children
- Learning to listen to my children/teens and talk with them about things that matter to them
- Managing screen time and social media use with my children/teens
- Getting involved with my children/teens in serving people in need
- Developing the strengths and potential of my child
- Managing my time and balancing the many commitments as a parent
- Developing strong relationships of warmth and love in our family and express care for each other
- Encouraging children/teens to talk about their doubts and questions about faith
- Providing moral and values instruction to my children'/teens and teaching them healthy concepts of right and wrong
- Growing in my (parent) relationship with Jesus Christ and what it means to follow Jesus in daily life
- Growing in my (parent) understanding and practice of the Catholic faith
- Praying together as a family

Part 2. A Vision for Family & Parent Faith Formation in the First Two Decades of Life

1. A New Approach: Parents and Families at the Center

Parents and the family are the most powerful influence for virtually every child and youth outcome—personal, academic, social, and spiritual-religious; and that parents are the most important influence on the social and religious lives of children, youth, and emerging adults. Given the central role of families in shaping the lives of children and youth, the value of engaging, supporting, and educating families should be self-evident to all of us.

Embracing the “parents and families at the center” approach means adopting a new set of attitudes and assumptions about families and faith formation, including:

- Seeing the home as the essential and foundational environment for faith nurture, faith practice, and the healthy development of young people.
- Reinforcing the family’s central role in promoting healthy development and faith growth in children and youth, and enhancing the faith-forming capacity of parents and grandparents.
- Building faith formation around the lives of the today’s families and parents, rather than having the church prescribe the programs and activities that families will participate in.
- Addressing the diversity of family life today by moving away from one-size fits all programs and strategies toward a variety of programs and strategies tailored to the unique life tasks and situations, concerns and interests, and religious-spiritual journeys of parents and families.
- Overcoming the age-segregated nature of church and its programming by engaging parents and the entire family in meaningful intergenerational relationships and faith formation that involves all ages and families.
- Building upon the assets, strengths, and capacities present in parents and families, rather than focusing on their deficits and solving problems.
- Partnering with parents in working toward shared goals and aspirations for their young people by supporting, equipping, and resourcing them.

Embracing the “parents and families at the center” approach means letting go of outdated attitudes and practices that tend to dominate the current approach to families. It means letting go of control over families and becoming more family friendly and responsive in everything we do. It means moving away from spending time, energy, and resources to get parents and families to comply with church priorities and expectations (“what we want them to do”) toward becoming responsive to what is happening in the lives of parents and families, and engaging with them wherever they may be.

We are proposing a new comprehensive approach to family faith formation that realizes the vision of families at the center of faith formation and is better suited to the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century. We are proposing an approach that promotes growth in faith and discipleship,

develops the family as a community of faith and school of discipleship, and equips parents (and grandparents) to transmit the religious tradition at home. This new approach is grounded in solid research on what promotes growth in faith and healthy individual and family development, and addresses the family as a whole, its individual members (children, teens, emerging adults), parents/grandparents, and the faith community. It builds a connection between families and the church and provides churches with a plan for how they can engage and equip families toward the goals of deeper faith and discipleship.

To bring this new approach to life, *Parents and Families at the Center of Faith Formation* is guided by five goals:

1. To **Encourage** parents/caregivers to *grow* in the Catholic faith as adults.
2. To **Equip** parents/caregivers to *build* families that live Christian practices at home and in the world.
3. To **Engage** parents/caregivers in learning how to become *faith formers* of their children and teens.
4. To **Involve** the whole family in faith forming experiences and programs in the *parish* community.
5. To **Connect** families with the other generations in the parish community through *intergenerational* faith forming experiences.



2. Family Faith Formation in the *Directory for Catechesis*

The *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) presents the family as central to catechetical ministry and the Church's future. *The family is a community of love and of life, made up of a complex of interpersonal relationships. . . . through which each human person is introduced into the human family and into the family of God which is the Church* (226).

The *Directory* presents family catechesis in three ways: catechesis **in** the family – focusing on parents nurturing faith, catechesis **with** the family – focusing on the parish community forming the faith of families, and catechesis **of** the family – focusing on the family proclaiming the Gospel. These ways can form the foundation and framework for family catechesis in parish communities. (See paragraphs 224-235)

Catechesis in the family emphasizes the central role of the family in nurturing faith.

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 a 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 Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God. . . It is a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured into periods. (227)

- *How can the parish develop initiatives for catechesis in the family that emphasize the central role of the family in nurturing faith.*
 - What would it be like to equip parents to incorporate family practices into the ordinary and extraordinary events of family life at home?
 - What would it be like to encourage parents to grow in faith and become faith formers of their children?

Catechesis with the family emphasizes the role of the parish community in forming the faith of families, centered on the kerygma.

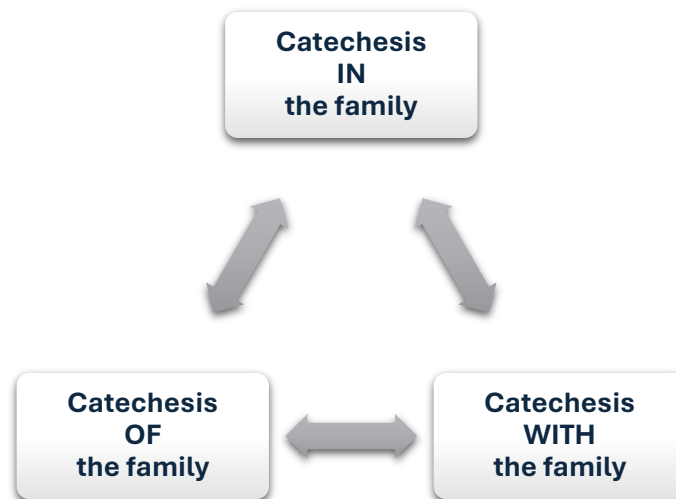
The Church proclaims the Gospel to the family. . . . At the present time, catechesis with families is permeated by the kerygma because in and among families the Gospel message should always resound. . . . This message has to occupy the center of all evangelizing activities. Moreover, in the dynamic of missionary conversion catechesis with families is characterized 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 evangelization 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 evangelization. (230)

- *How can the parish develop initiatives for catechesis with the family that emphasize the role of the parish community in forming the faith of families?*
 - What would it be like to partner with parents and the whole family in education and formation programming that effectively enhances faith transmission?
 - What would it be like to offer family catechesis as a primary model of formation for parents and children and/or to design family-centered sacrament preparation and/or to offer regular family workshops, family festivals, and parent education programming?

Catechesis of the family emphasizes the role of the family in proclaiming the Gospel.

As a domestic church . . . the Christian family takes part in the Church's mission 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 evangelizing mission. It naturally begins to spread the faith to all around them, even outside the family circle. In addition to its natural service of child-rearing, the family is therefore called to contribute to the building up the Christian community and to bear witness to the Gospel in society. (231)

- *How can the parish develop initiatives for catechesis **of** the family that emphasize the role of the family in proclaiming the Gospel?*
- What would it be like to equip parents with the knowledge and skills to share their faith with other parents?
 - What would it be like to engage the family in projects and experiences that put faith into action through engagement in church ministries and service to the wider community?



3. Four Research Conclusions: Faith Formation with Parents & Families

Designing family faith formation is guided by contemporary research on the role and significance of parents/caregivers in family faith formation. Four central insights emerge from the research and guides the development of new approaches.

#1. Parents are the most significant influence on the religious and spiritual outcomes of young people.

At the heart of all the research is the finding that the most important influence shaping the religious and spiritual lives of children and youth is their parents. The overwhelming evidence from the research studies shows that the parents of American youth play the leading role in shaping the character of their religious and spiritual lives, even well after they leave home and often for the rest of their lives.

One of the most basic suggestions of our findings is that young adults arrive at a sense of their fundamental identity and worldview not by weighing all possible intellectual arguments for and against a proposed way of life, but rather by roughly adopting the worldview of those mentors who left the deepest impression upon them—and who loved them and cared for them the most. It should come as no surprise, then, that the emergence of the new generation of dedicated young Catholics will rise and fall with the choices of their parents. (Bartkus and Smith, 70)

The single most powerful force in a child's religious formation is the spiritual personality of the parent. We know the parental factors that make a significant difference in promoting faith in children and youth include:

- parents' personal faith and practice
- a close and warm parent-child relationship
- parent modeling and teaching a religious faith
- parent involvement in church life and Sunday worship
- grandparent religious influence and relationship (Bengston, et al.)

It is critically important that parents are authentic examples of what they claim to believe. Their authenticity includes faithful living as well as sharing with their children their struggles and failings.

#2. The primary way by which Catholic identity becomes rooted in children's lives are the day-to-day religious practices of the family and the ways parents model their faith and share it in conversation, collaboration, and exposure to outside religious opportunities.

The crucial location where young people's religious outcomes are largely decided is not the parish or Catholic school, but the home. The primary responsibility for passing on religious faith and practice to children rests with parents; religious congregations (and Catholic schools) are secondary and primarily serve to provide support. This means that the most important agent in the religious and spiritual outcomes of children and youth are neither clergy nor youth ministers, neither educators nor the voices of popular culture and media, but parents. (Bartkus and Smith)

In *Religious Parenting*, Smith, et al. affirm this finding, "Parents have only one good and hopefully effective way to raise children to understand and carry on their family's religion (or perhaps return to it someday after a period of disaffection). That is for parents simply to practice their own personal religious faith, naturally, for its own sake and as role models for their children. If all goes well, children will over time learn, absorb, and embrace their own version of that faith, almost unconsciously. (Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo, 179)

#3. The family is the primary community where Catholic faith practices are nurtured and practiced.

We have discovered through research that certain faith practices make a significant difference in nurturing the faith of children and adolescents at home. "Raising religious children should thus primarily be a practice-centered process, not chiefly a didactic teaching program. Parents modeling religious practices is primary, and explaining belief systems is secondary" (Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo, 179). Among the most important practices are:

- Reading the Bible as a family and encouraging young people to read the Bible regularly
- Praying together as a family and encouraging young people to pray personally
- Serving people in need as a family and supporting service activities by young people
- Eating together as a family
- Having family conversations about faith
- Talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts
- Ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences
- Celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home
- Providing moral instruction
- Being involved in a faith community and participating regularly in Sunday worship as a family

The way that family prayer unifies the family stands out. Family prayer is a time of family togetherness and interaction, a space for social support, and a means for intergenerational transmission of moral and spiritual values. Family prayer include the issues and concerns of individuals and the family, helps reduce relational tensions, and provides feelings of connectedness, unity, and bonding. (Dollahite, Marks, and Boyd)

#4. The quality of a parent's relationships with their children or teens and the parenting style they practice make a significant difference in faith transmission.

Parents cultivate relationships of warmth and love which makes everything else possible. While faith practices and attending religious services are important, the quality of the parent-child relationship is even more important. (Dollahite, Marks, and Boyd)

Parents balance religious firmness with religious flexibility in their parenting. Parents who can avoid religious rigidity through balance are more likely to maintain more positive relationships with their children. (Dollahite, Marks, and Boyd)

Parents balance desire for religious continuity with children's agency. They transmit their faith to their children while honoring their children's agency by teaching principles and values, providing expectations of religious participation and responsibility, not forcing faith, allowing exploration and mistakes, and showing respect for children's views. (Dollahite, Marks, and Boyd)

Parents talk with their children about religious matters during the week. This is one of the most powerful mechanisms for the success or failure of religious transmission to children. When parents talk about their religion in personal terms, that sends a strong message to their kids that it's really important to them. (Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo)

Parents practice an "authoritative" parenting style (as opposed to authoritarian, permissive, or uninvolved style). Parents maintain and enforce high standards and expectations for their children while simultaneously expressing a lot of open warmth and connection to their children and confidently giving them enough space to work out their own views and values. (Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo)

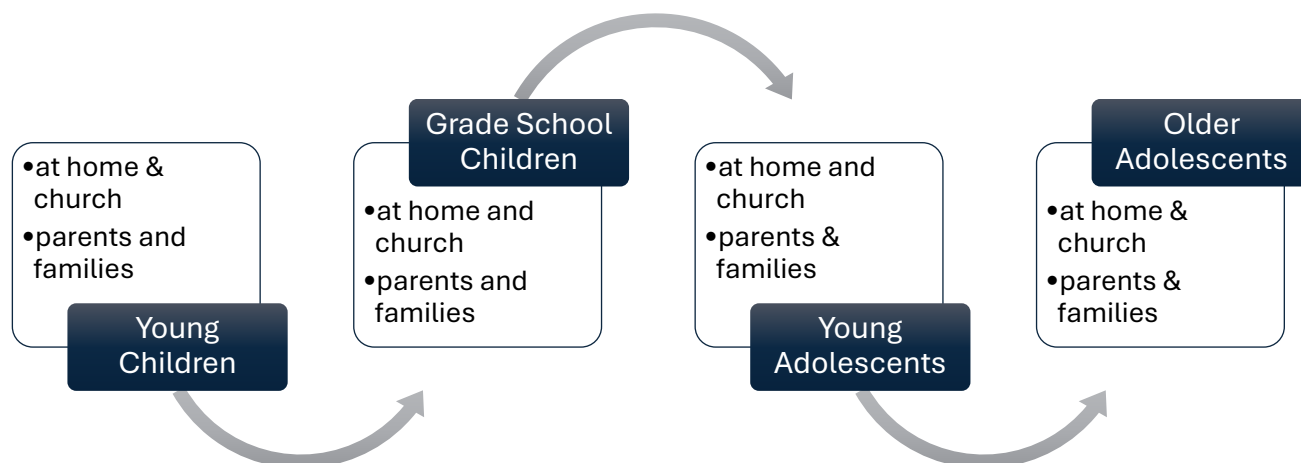
Parents listen more and preach less. The way parents approach parent-youth conversations about religion and spirituality matters. It is a more satisfying and successful religious and relational experience when the conversations were more youth-centered than parent-centered. (Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo) (Dollahite, Marks, and Boyd)

Works Cited

- Bengston, Vern, et al. *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Bartkus, Justin and Christian Smith. *A Report on American Catholic Religious Parenting*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2017.
- Dollahite, David, Loren Marks, and Hal Boyd. "The Best Practices—and Benefits—of Religious Parenting." Public Discourse. February 6, 2020. (Accessed at <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/02/59688>)
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4. Family Faith Formation in the First Two Decades of Life

A plan for family faith formation provides continuous and seamless faith formation – at home and parish – from birth through 19 years old for parents, children and adolescents, and the entire family.



Parish plans are guided by five **goals**. . . .

1. To **Encourage** parents/caregivers to *grow* in the Catholic faith as adults.
2. To **Equip** parents/caregivers to *build* families that live Christian practices at home and in the world.
3. To **Engage** parents/caregivers in learning how to become *faith formers* of their children and teens.
4. To **Involve** the whole family in faith forming experiences and programs in the *parish* community.
5. To **Connect** families with the other generations in the parish community through *intergenerational* faith forming experiences.

Parish plans are developed around eight **elements** of family faith formation. . . .

At each stage of life faith formation incorporates programs, activities, resources, and relationships that are developmentally appropriate and responsive to diverse religiosities. The eight elements form a plan for designing programs, activities, and resources.

1. **Family faith practices:** reading the Bible, praying, serving, working for justice, caring for creation, eating together, having family faith conversations, providing moral instruction, and more
2. **Liturgical formation:** preparing families to worship God with the parish community at Sunday Mass
3. **Milestone rituals:** ritualizing life transitions and important family life celebrations
4. **Church year feasts and seasons:** celebrating throughout the year at home and in the parish, including Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and more

5. **Parent education:** developing practices and skills appropriate to each stage of childhood and adolescence
6. **Parental formation:** equipping parents to be faith formers of their children and adolescents
7. **Family formation:** family catechesis programs and activities for the whole family
8. **Intergenerational relationships:** connecting families with other generations through intergenerational faith forming experiences

Parish plans need to be **responsive** to

1. **Context:** the unique needs of parents and families in a parish community
2. **Life Stage Development:** programs, activities, strategies, and resources appropriate to the stages of young children, grade school children, middle school adolescents, and high school adolescents.
3. **Culture:** the ethnic backgrounds, traditions, and needs of parents and families
4. **Religious Diversity:** the diverse religiosities and faith journeys of parents and families
5. **Family Structure:** the diversity of family structures
6. **Special Needs:** the families with children who have special needs and disabilities

A Framework for Developing a Family Faith Formation Plan

	Children 0-5	Children 6-10	Youth 11-14	Youth 14-19
Forming the faith of the family <u>at home</u> through.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family faith practices Liturgical formation Milestones rituals Church year feasts and seasons 				
Forming the faith of the family in the <u>parish</u> through.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family faith practices Liturgical formation Milestones rituals Church year feasts and seasons 				
Equipping parents with practices and skills for parenting through.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops, webinars, support groups, etc. Resources 				
Equipping parents to be faith formers of their children through.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops, webinars, retreats, small groups, etc. Resources 				
Providing family catechesis for the entire family through programs, events, and gatherings at the parish.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thematic family catechesis (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) Family catechesis programs on the Church year seasons Family workshops on religious and family life topics 				
Fostering intergenerational relationships..... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Connecting families with other generations through intergenerational faith forming experiences 				

Example of a Family Catechesis Plan for Families with Children from Birth to Age 5

Programs, activities, and resources are designed to provide a variety of experiences that address the distinct religious needs and interests of Active Believers, Believers, and Inactive Believers.

Forming the faith of the family at home

- Monthly digital newsletter (with website page) of activities for the whole family and age-appropriate activities for each of the five years of early childhood, including a monthly Bible story, prayers throughout the day and week (bedtime, mealtime, seasons of the year), movie/video suggestions, family activities, etc.
- Milestones activities (online) to celebrate the transitions or rituals of early childhood, such as birthdays, baptism anniversaries, first prayers (learning the Lord's Prayer), entry to preschool and kindergarten, etc.
- "Welcome to the Season Celebration Kits" digital and print resource for the home to introduce young children to the celebration of the seasons of the Church year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints/All Souls)
- Children's "Storybook of the Month" – age appropriate suggestions of storybooks that focus on values, morals, and spiritual themes

Forming the faith of the family in the parish and fostering intergenerational relationships

- Connecting parents at Baptism with mentors from the parish community (e.g., grandparents) to accompany them on their journey from Baptism to start of school (pray for them, meet with them, accompany them to Sunday Mass, etc.)
- Children's Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass where children through prayers, songs and readings learn about the same Scriptures as the rest of the community
- "Welcome to Sunday Mass" experience for families with young children, including a video for parent preparation, an illustrated guide to the Mass for children to use at Mass, age-appropriate activities for children on the lectionary readings (e.g., coloring a handout illustrating the Gospel reading during Mass or at home)
- Parish dinner for families who had a child baptized in the past to meet other parents with young children (babysitting provided), hosted by the ministries and organizations of the parish (such as a women's group and men's group)
- Seasonal creative arts festivals, e.g., Advent wreath-making activity at the parish for families with young children and grade school children

Equipping parents with practices and skills for parenting and to be faith forms of their children

- A two-part "Welcome to a New Stage of Life" workshop and/or webinar focused on understanding growth and development of young children, parent practices for this stage of life, faith forming activities appropriate to this stage of life (how to pray with children, how to read a Bible story, etc.)
- Parent enrichment webinars (monthly or quarterly) and an online parent library of videos, podcasts, and articles on topics of interest to parents of young children
- Twice yearly half-day retreat for parents of young children to nurture their growth in faith and to connect and share with other parents (with babysitting)
- Parent support groups for support, prayer, and faith sharing (in-person or online)

Example of a Family Catechesis Plan for Families with Children in Grades 1 through 8

Programs, activities, and resources are designed to provide a variety of experiences that address the distinct religious needs and interests of Active Believers, Believers, and Inactive Believers.

Providing family catechesis for the entire family

- Monthly family catechesis program using the following format:
 - Week #1. Family session at church on the topic of the month (90 minutes to 2 hours)
 - Week #2. At-home faith formation with online resources on the topic of the month
 - Week #3. Age group session at church for children, young teens, and parents to go deeper into the topic of the month (75-90 minutes)
 - Week #4. At-home faith formation with online resources on the topic of the month
(For additional family catechesis models see in Part 4 of this Guide.)
- Theme for the Year: Jesus and Discipleship
 - Preparing for the Messiah - December
 - Becoming a Disciple – Part 1 and 2 (January and February)
 - Death of the Messiah – Lent and Holy Week
 - New Life in Christ – Easter Season
 - Identity of Christ – Easter Season
 - Living as a Disciple – September-November

(For examples of family learning sessions go to: <https://www.intergenerationalfaith.com/jesus--discipleship.html>)

Forming the faith of the family at home

- “Faith at Home” monthly online experiences with a variety of activities for age groups and family activities on the theme of the monthly family program. Types of activities: Scripture reading and reflection, prayer, family faith conversations, living your faith, watching videos on the topic, etc.
- “Seasonal Celebration Kits” digital and print resource to prepare for, celebrate (at church and home), and live the Church year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints/All Souls)
- “Big Bible Story of the Month” – age appropriate activities for the family to read, explore, pray, and apply one Bible story each month

Forming the faith of the family in the parish and fostering intergenerational relationships

- Family engaging celebrations of the Church year feasts and seasons with at-home celebration using the “Seasonal Celebration Kit”
- Quarterly “Service Project Days” for the entire family, together with the other generations in the parish

Equipping parents with practices and skills for parenting and faith forming

- Annual retreat day for parents, focused on their growth in faith and discipleship
- A two-part “Welcome to a New Stage of Life” workshop (and/or webinar) – one for parents with children entering grade 1 and a second for parents with young people entering middle school – focused on understanding growth and development, parent practices for this new stage of life, faith forming activities appropriate to this stage of life, etc.
- Parent enrichment webinars (monthly or quarterly) and online parent library of videos, podcasts, and articles on topics of interest to parents (see Parent Interests in the survey results):
 - discussing tough topics with my children
 - learning to listen to my children and talk with them about things that matter to them
 - managing screen time and social media use
 - developing the strengths and potential of my child
 - managing my time and balancing the many commitments as a parent
 - developing strong relationships of warmth and love in our family and expressing care for each other
 - encouraging children to talk about their doubts and questions about faith
 - providing moral and values instruction and teaching healthy concepts of right and wrong
 - praying together as a family

Part 3. Designing a Family Catechesis Plan

Step 1. Develop Ideas for a Family Faith Formation Plan

#1. Use the Framework for Developing a Family Faith Formation Plan worksheet to create your parish plan for family faith formation.

Forming the faith of the family at home through....

- Family faith practices
- Liturgical formation
- Milestones rituals
- Church year feasts and seasons

Forming the faith of the family in the parish through....

- Family faith practices
- Liturgical formation
- Milestones rituals
- Church year feasts and seasons

Equipping parents with practices and skills for parenting through....

- Workshops, webinars, support groups, etc.
- Resources

Equipping parents to be faith formers of their children through....

- Workshops, webinars, retreats, small groups, etc.
- Resources

Providing family catechesis for the entire family through programs, events, and gatherings at the parish....

- Thematic family catechesis (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly)
- Family catechesis programs on the Church year seasons
- Family workshops on religious and family life topics

Fostering intergenerational relationships.....

- Connecting families with other generations through intergenerational faith forming experiences

#2. Begin by adding existing programs and activities that the parish is offering into the appropriate category on the Framework.

#3. Plan for all styles of parent and family faith and practice by developing ideas that address **Active Believers** (who have a vibrant faith and are engaged in the parish); **Believers** (who participate occasionally in a parish community); **Inactive Believers** (who are not involved in a parish, but may value and live a spiritual life); and **Inactive Nonbelievers**.

#4. Begin with one stage of life and generate new ideas (age-appropriate faith forming programs, activities, strategies, and resources) for parent and family faith formation in the first two decades of life –

young children, grade school children, young adolescents, and older adolescents. Some ideas may apply to multiple life stages.

When you are generating ideas be sure to practice these simple rules. The key in generating ideas or strategies is to give yourself and the team the freedom to imagine the possibilities.

- Generate as many ideas and strategies as possible.
- Assume you have the resources you need for any idea (money, staff, facility, etc.).
- Don't place limits on your creativity.
- Remember that there is no discussion and no critique of ideas.
- Feel free to add onto other's ideas.

Use one newsprint sheet for each of the four life stages. Use the six categories of the "Framework for Developing a Family Faith Formation Plan."

1. Forming the faith of the family at home
2. Forming the faith of the family in the parish
3. Equipping parents with practices and skills for parenting
4. Equipping parents to be faith formers of their children/teens
5. Providing family catechesis for the entire family
6. Fostering intergenerational relationships

#5. Use the same process for the next three life stages.

#6. After you have finished generating ideas for the four life stages, review the ideas for each stage and connect similar ideas. Then create a final list of all the ideas you have generated for each stage of life.

A Framework for Developing a Family Faith Formation Plan

Using the Framework below, begin with one stage of life and generate new ideas (age-appropriate faith forming programs, activities, strategies, and resources) for parent and family faith formation. Some ideas may apply to multiple life stages. Be sure to add programs and activities that your parish is already providing into the appropriate categories.

Use one newsprint sheet for each life stage.

Categories of Parent & Family Faith Formation	Children 0-5	Children 6-10	Youth 11-14	Youth 14-19
Forming the faith of the family <u>at home</u> through.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family faith practices Liturgical formation Milestones rituals Church year feasts and seasons 				
Forming the faith of the family in the <u>parish</u> through.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family faith practices Liturgical formation Milestones rituals Church year feasts and seasons 				
Equipping parents with practices and skills for parenting through.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops, webinars, support groups, etc. Resources 				
Equipping parents to be faith formers of their children/teens through.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops, webinars, retreats, small groups, etc. Resources 				
Providing family catechesis for the entire family through programs, events, and gatherings at the parish.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thematic family catechesis (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) Family catechesis programs on the Church year feasts and seasons Family workshops on religious and family life topics 				
Fostering intergenerational relationships..... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Connecting families with other generations through intergenerational faith forming experiences 				

Step 2. Select Ideas to Create a Family Faith Formation Plan

#1. Make choices about how you want to design and implement in the Framework. For example, you can use one or more of these strategies to begin design work:

- Select the life stage of greatest need. Recall Activity #4 from Course 1 where you developed a profile of lifelong faith formation and identified areas for growth.
- Focus on one life stage with multiple activities and programs across all six categories.
- Combine two life stages (children or adolescents) and identify ideas that apply to all families with children or all families with adolescents.
- Select one or two of the six elements of the Framework (e.g., forming faith at home or parent education and formation) and develop ideas for all four life stages.
- Identify a major program, such as implementing a family catechesis program, as a focus for your plan. Integrate other elements, such as parent formation and forming faith at home, into the family catechesis plan.

#2. Develop your plan in a three-year timeframe by designing and implementing new ideas based on your readiness and capacity.

- **Short-Term Planning:** ideas that can be integrated into existing plans and programs or can be designed and implemented quickly in the first year. This would be especially true for initiatives that are enhancements or an expansion of a current program or activity.
- **Mid-Term Planning:** ideas that need more design time and that can be implemented within one or two years. These initiatives need to be sequenced for implementation and might involve piloting the new program or activity first before expanding to a wider audience.
- **Long-Term Planning:** ideas that need design time, piloting and testing, and then implementation over the several years. These initiatives are long term projects that require more time for planning and building capacity, and need to be introduced in stages over multiple years.

Short Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
<i>We will implement this program or activity in our first year.</i>	<i>We need time for designing so we will implement this later in Year 1 or in Year 2.</i>	<i>We need time for designing and testing this program or activity so we will implement this in Year 2 or 3.</i>
Program or Activity	Program or Activity	Program or Activity
Program or Activity	Program or Activity	Program or Activity
Program or Activity	Program or Activity	Program or Activity

Step 3. Design Programs, Activities, Strategies, and Resources

1. Identify the Target Audience

- Who are you designing for?
- What are their needs, interests, concerns, life issues, etc.?

2. Define the Goals (or Outcomes)

- What will parents or the entire family understand and be able to do by participating or experiencing this program or activity?
- Try to connect your goals to the faith maturing goals you developed in Course #2.

3. Develop the Content or Theme

- What will be the content of the program, activity, strategy, and/or resource?
- Will you be able to curate existing resources in print, audio, video, and online/digital formats?
- Will you need to create the program, activity, strategy, or resource?

4. Choose the Format(s) [See next section for more information]

- Use one or more formats to offer the program/activity/strategy/resource. You can offer one experience in multiple formats, expanding opportunities to engage people. Here are 9 formats that can be used alone or in combination with each other.
 1. One your own learning
 2. Mentoring
 3. At home learning
 4. Small group learning
 5. Large group learning
 6. Community-based learning
 7. Online-only learning
 8. Hybrid learning (in-person and online)
 9. One program designed in multiple formats

5. Schedule the Programs and Activities

- What is the timeline for implementing the program/activity/strategy/resource?
- When will the program (or activity) be offered? Dates? Time?
- When will the activity or strategy be implemented? Dates? Time?

6. Find Leaders

- How many leaders will you need and what will they do?
- How will you find and invite leaders?
- How will you prepare leaders for their work?

7. Identify the Need for Additional Resources and Costs

- What additional resources are needed to implement the program/activity/strategy/resource?
- What is the cost to design and implement the program/activity/strategy/resource?

8. Promote the Program/Activity/Strategy/Resource

- How will you promote and launch the program/activity/strategy/resource?
- How will you promote this on the parish website and social media.
- How will use existing communication channels, such as the bulletin, email, and texting?

- Will you create printed or digital material (brochure, poster, flyer, etc.)?
- Will you need a registration or sign-up system?

9. Evaluate the Program/Activity/Strategy/Resource

- Determine how and when you will receive feedback from people on the program/activity/strategy/resource?

Formats

1. On Your Own Format

On your own learning provides maximum flexibility for the learner – when to learn, how to learn, where to learn, and what to learn. With the increasing number and variety of books and printed resources, audio podcasts, video presentations, video programs, online courses, and online resource centers, independent learning offers a 24/7 approach to faith growth and learning. Churches can serve as guide to help people find the best learning format and content to address their learning needs. Examples:

- Reading or listening to books and online recommended reading lists
- Websites for learning, prayer and spiritual formation, action for service and justice
- Online courses: Bible, theology, spirituality, life issues, and more
- Online retreat
- Podcasts
- Videos and video-based programs
- Online prayer websites
- Daily activities online and through apps: prayer, Bible reading, devotions, and much more

2. Mentoring Format

Mentoring provides a one-to-one relationship that can be utilized as an individual program option, such as a spiritual director/guide with an individual, or as a component in a larger program, such as having mentors for each person in the Christian initiation process or grandparents serving as mentors/guides for new parents. Mentoring works older to younger, but also younger to older as in the case of young people mentoring adults. Examples:

- Spiritual direction
- Apprenticeships
- Life transitions
- Gifts discernment
- Vocational or calling discernment and formation

3. At-Home Format

At home formats provide individuals and whole families with experiences, programs, activities, and resources designed for use at home or in daily life. This can include a wide variety of print, audio, video, digital media, and online programs and resources. Examples:

- Online resources and playlists for faith practice at home—praying together, reading the Bible, celebrating rituals and milestones, celebrating the church year seasons, serving, learning the Christian story, eating together, having family conversations, providing moral instruction, and talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts
- Milestone preparation and celebrations
- Celebration of seasons of the church year and the calendar year

- Sunday worship activities for families—conversations, table rituals, podcast or video, daily prayer, Bible reading, service ideas
- Online ideas and resources for parents—faith sharing, parenting skills, family life activities
- Parent support groups online or in physical spaces

4. Small Group Format

Small group formats provide lots of flexibility in content, schedule, and location (online, home, coffee shops, at church, and more). Groups can meet at times and places that best fit members' lives. Small groups create an accepting environment in which new relationships can be formed. It is not always necessary for the church leaders to conduct small group programs. Churches can provide resources, support, and training for small group leaders, thereby enabling people to organize their own small groups. Examples

- Discipleship, faith sharing, or study groups such as Bible study groups, theological study groups, thematic or issue-oriented study groups, Sunday lectionary-based faith-sharing groups, seasonal small groups such as Lenten study groups
- Mini-courses of 4-6 weeks
- Spiritual formation and direction
- Prayer and spiritual growth groups
- Book or video study groups
- Practice-focused groups such as prayer groups and service/faith in action groups
- Support groups for caregiving, recovery, grief, divorce
- Parent support groups for different stages of family life
- Life transition groups—college, careers, retirement

5. Large Group Format

Large group formats provide a way to engage a wider audience with programming and experiences that can be utilized for a variety of theological, biblical, and life-centered themes and topics. Examples:

- Presentations and single-session programs
- Multisession program such as a speaker series or video series
- Mini-courses of 4-6 weeks
- Seasonal celebrations and presentations through the church year
- Roundtable discussions after Sunday worship to explore the scripture readings and sermon
- Workshops focused on practical knowledge and skills for age groups or families or all ages
- Field trips such as visiting a museum or cultural site
- Retreat experiences such as an evening, one-day, or weekend program
- Summer programs
- Intergenerational programs for all ages
- Church-wide action projects for service, justice, or care for creation
- Intergenerational faith formation programs
- Whole family faith formation programs
- Music, art, film, drama or dance programs, performances, and festivals
- Conferences

6. Community Format

Community-based formats offer a way for churches to utilize programs, courses, clinics, workshops, and presentations sponsored by other churches, community organizations (libraries, the Y, museums), regional and national church agencies, retreat centers, Christian camps, and colleges and universities.

7. Online-Only Format

Parishes can develop fully online catechetical programming (asynchronous) by offering independent (on your own) faith formation using the abundance of online programs and resources for all ages, especially adults. Leaders can curate courses and resources to organize playlists or webpages with self-directed learning topics like Scripture, prayer and spiritual formation, social justice issues, theological themes, morality and ethics, and much more. Churches can develop a complete online faith formation experience with content and experiences, such as an online Advent or Lent curriculum that connects the seasonal events at church with online content for experiencing the season in daily and home life. The online experiences can include prayer activities, daily Bible readings, daily devotions, study resources, videos, and service activities.

Churches can use video conferencing to create webinars, such as a monthly theology presentation for adults or a monthly one-hour parent formation. A parent webinar series can be designed around the knowledge, skills, and practices for faith forming and effective parenting, and use guest presenters to conduct the webinars. A church could blend the monthly webinars with one or two parent dinners (childcare or parallel children's programming provided) during the year for parents to gather in-person to meet each other and discuss what they are learning through webinars.

8. Hybrid Format (Online and In-Person)

Hybrid models of catechesis hold together two important values in faith formation: 1) the importance of in-person relationships and faith-forming experiences and 2) the importance of being responsive to the complexity of people's lives and their religious-spiritual needs. Hybrid models expand faith formation opportunities for everyone. Parishes can become much more intentional about when, where, how, and why they gather because they can now integrate online with in-person faith forming. The key to hybrid catechesis is the integration of in-person faith forming with online faith forming in one holistic integrated experience.

One way to develop a hybrid model is to begin in-person and then deepen it with online programming.

Worship & Online Formation

- Participate in weekly worship (in-person or live streamed).
- Engage in faith forming activities using an online playlist on Sunday's theme: prayers, readings, video, podcast, art, music, creative activities, conversations, action ideas, etc.

In-Person & Online Formation

- Meet in-person once per month (or every other week).
- Engage in online faith formation for the other weeks using a playlist on the theme.

In-Person & Online & Video Meetings

- Week #1: Meet in-person for the program.
- Week #2: Engage in online faith forming experiences using a playlist on the theme.
- Week #3: Continue with the playlist learning on the theme.
- Week #4: Conduct a video meeting (Zoom) for small groups or age groups or families to discuss and apply the online learning.

In-Person & Live Streamed or Video & Online

- Week #1: Meet in-person for the program.
- Week #2: Engage in online faith forming experiences using a playlist on the theme.

- Week #3: Conduct a livestream presentation or demonstration or prerecorded video (using Zoom, Facebook Live, or YouTube Live) on the theme of the month's program.
- Week #4: Continue with the playlist learning on the theme.

A second way to develop a hybrid model is to begin with online programming leading to in-person experiences. This approach is known as *Flipped Learning* in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space online, and the group space is transformed into a dynamic interactive learning environment where the leader/teacher guides participants as they creatively discuss, practice, and apply the content. Here is a basic outline of a 4-week model.

Online & Small Group Gatherings

- Week #1: Engage in online learning on the theme.
- Week #2: Participate in a small group gathering to discuss and apply the learning (in-person or through video conferencing)
- Week #3: Engage in online learning on the theme.
- Week #4: Participate in a small group gathering to discuss and apply the learning (in-person or through video conferencing)

Flipped Learning is very helpful when it is difficult to gather people, such as preparation for a sacrament. We can *prepare* people online with the appropriate content (experiences, activities, video/audio, and resources); then *engage* them in-person for the event or program; and *sustain and apply* the experience through online formation.

- **On Your Own:** Engage people with a learning playlist—watching videos, reading short articles, praying, writing reflections in a journal—on the theme.
- **In a Small Group:** Have people participate in one small group experience (online) to discuss the content in the playlist and what they are learning.
- **In a Large Group:** Involve people in a monthly meeting for community sharing, interactive activities, short presentations, and ideas for living faith.

9. One Program Designed in Multiple Formats

With multiple ways to program in physical, online, and hybrid spaces, one program or experience can be designed in all three spaces, increasing the availability to a wider audience of people while not increasing the number of unique programs a parish creates. The choice is no longer whether to participate or not, but which option best suits a person's time, schedule, and learning preferences. Here is an example of a program that is conducted in multiple formats – same program, multiple ways to experience it.

1. *Large group physical gathering:* People gather at church and a leader facilitates the program—making a presentation (or having a guest presenter) or showing a video, providing time for people to read and reflect, and guiding small groups in discussing the content.
2. *Small group physical gathering:* People gather in small groups in homes or coffee shops or other conducive setting, watch the video, read and reflect on the content, and discuss the content.
3. *Small group hybrid:* People watch the video on their own, then gather online in a small group (Zoom or other video conferencing platform) to reflect and discuss the content.
4. *Online with interaction:* People complete the sessions on their own and share reflections in a Facebook group (asynchronous) or meet on Zoom to discuss the program (synchronous).
5. *Online independent:* People complete the learning program on their own.

Part 3. Models of Family Catechesis

For examples of family learning programs go to: <https://www.intergenerationalfaith.com>.

Catechesis with families engages the whole family in faith formation experiences (parents and caregivers, young people, and grandparents) as the *primary* model for catechesis with families (monthly, twice-a-month, or weekly), as an *integrated* model within age group programming and/or within the seasons of the year (Advent, Lent, and more) and/or as family workshops throughout the year, and as family-centered *sacramental preparation* (Reconciliation and First Eucharist).

The family catechesis learning process involves five elements in an extended time format for two hours.

1. A shared meal
2. A shared prayer experience
3. A whole family learning experience on the topic of the program with content and methods appropriate to all-ages
4. An in-depth learning on the topic which can be conducted in three different ways:
 - a. the whole family learning together with activities appropriate to all ages
 - b. parallel groups (children, teens, parents) learning at the same time with content and learning activities appropriate to each age group
 - c. learning activity centers with whole family and age-specific learning activities
5. A closing whole family activity to discover how to apply their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or digital formats.

A Primary Model of Family Catechesis

Family catechesis as the **Primary Learning Model** for parents, children, and young teens is developed around monthly or yearly themes drawn from the Creed, sacraments, morality, justice and service, prayer and spiritual life, Church year seasons, Scripture, Christian practices, and more. Family catechesis models blend gathered experiences (at church or in family small groups in homes or other settings), at-home faith formation, and online resources. They can be structured and scheduled in several ways to respond to the needs of a parish community, such as monthly, twice monthly, or weekly programming.

A Monthly Plan with a family session and at-home faith formation:

- Week #1. Family session at church or in small groups of families (90 minutes to 2 hours)
- Week #2. At-home faith formation with online resources
- Week #3. At-home faith formation with online resources
- Week #4. At-home faith formation with online resources

A Monthly Plan with a family session, at-home practice, and age group learning:

- Week #1. Family session at church or in small groups of families (90 minutes to 2 hours)
- Week #2. At-home faith formation with online resources
- Week #3. Age group learning session at church for children, young teens, and parents (90 minutes)
- Week #4. At-home faith formation with online resources

A Twice Monthly Plan with a family session and at-home faith formation:

- Week #1. Family session at church or in small groups of families (90 minutes to 2 hours)
- Week #2. At-home faith formation with online resources

Week #3. Family session at church or in small groups of families (90 minutes to 2 hours)
Week #4. At-home faith formation with online resources

A Weekly Plan with family sessions at church or in small groups of families:

In the Weekly Plan the movements of the learning process are assigned to individual weeks. Over a month the entire learning process is experienced. Each session is usually one hour in length.

Week #1. A whole family learning experience with content and methods appropriate to all-ages

Week #2. An in-depth learning conducted in one of three ways: a) the whole family learning together with activities appropriate to all ages in the family; b) parallel groups (children, teens, parents) learning at the same time with content and learning activities appropriate to each age group; c) learning activity centers with whole family and age-specific learning activities

Week #3. A whole family activity to discover how to apply their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or digital formats.

Week #4. At-home practice with online resources

An Integrated Model of Family Catechesis

An **Integrated Model** incorporates family catechesis within the age group curriculum for grades 1-8. The themes for family catechesis can flow from the age group curriculum or focus on core faith themes and Church year seasons. Here is an example of a 4-week sequence. (*This continues throughout the year.*)

Weeks #1-3. Age group catechesis
Week #4. Family learning experience
Weeks #5-7. Age group catechesis
Week #8. Family learning experience

A **Seasonal Plan** is built around the Church year seasons and feasts – Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints/All Souls, and more. Family catechesis sessions are incorporated into the schedule of the year so that age group programs and activities are not scheduled during a family catechesis program. A Season Plan is an excellent way to introduce family catechesis to the families and the parish community.

A **Workshop Plan** is designed around family life skills that will strengthen family life, and parent-child/teen relationships, such as communicating effectively, discussing tough topics, making decisions and solving problems as a family, learning how to build strong relationships and express care for each other, supporting each other (encouraging and praising, giving feedback, standing up for each other), and treating each with respect and dignity. A Workshop Plan can provide occasional family or parent-only gatherings throughout the year. Workshops can also be designed as mini-conferences (e.g., 3 hours) on a Saturday or Sunday with a general session for the whole family and break-out sessions for parents, children, and teens.

Additional Family Catechesis Models

1. Family-centered sacramental preparation programs
2. Family cluster or small group learning programs
3. Family-centered vacation Bible school
4. Family-centered (small group or large group) lectionary-based Scripture reflection
5. Family retreats and camps
6. Family Bible study