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FIVE WAYS TO SHARE YOUR FAITH

Parents, family faith practices, intergenerational relationships, parishes, and online connections—these building blocks can help our faith flourish everywhere. *by John Roberto*



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Until recently, many Catholics considered the word *evangelization* as belonging to “other Christians.” It seemed that *they* evangelized, and *we* didn’t. Yet, when Jesus appeared to the apostles following his resurrection, he told them to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19a). This is the commission of all the baptized—young, old, married, single, religious, and clergy. We follow Jesus’ command through the many ordinary ways we share the good news, invite others into relationship with Christ, and model how to live as Catholic Christians.

Becoming evangelists is at the heart of who we are and who we’re called to be as Christian disciples. We must both evangelize and be evangelized. The Catholic Church has been doing evangelization for over 2,000 years! In every age, the Church asks: *How can we engage people in a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ and pass on the Catholic faith from generation to generation?*

MAKING DISCIPLES

Five building blocks of Catholic evangelization will help us to live and grow as disciples. As we place block upon block, we share the importance of our growing relationship with Christ with our families, parishes, communities, and world.

1. PARENTS MODEL FAITH

At the heart of all faith formation is the family—children, parents, grandparents, and extended family members—and the mission entrusted to them of passing on a living faith from generation to generation. The single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of children, adolescents, and emerging adults is their parents—and grandparents. According to the National Study of Youth and Religion (2001–2013), of the parents who report faith as *extremely* important in their daily lives, two-thirds of their teens report that faith is *extremely* or *very* important in their daily lives.

What can parents, grandparents, and other adults do to share the importance of their faith with children?

- Express and practice your Catholic faith.
- Model and teach the faith in the rhythms of everyday life.
- Pray alone and as a family.
- Read the Bible alone and as a family.

These are the basics—simple, but not easy. While not a guarantee, the living faith of parents (and grandparents) is a great predictor of what the religious and spiritual lives of

their children, youth, and young adults will grow to become. A parent’s personal and lived faith is one of the most important influences on the lives of children.

Reflect

- *How can I continue to grow in my faith and model and teach the Catholic faith at home?*
- *How can I join with other parents and adults to learn, grow, and support each other in living our faith in today’s world?*

2. FAMILY FAITH PRACTICES

Nurturing the growth of faith at home occurs through religious activities connected with daily family routines: eating together; praying in the morning, evening, and at mealtimes; having family conversations; displaying sacred objects and religious images—especially a Bible, crucifix, or image of Jesus; celebrating holy days, holidays, and Church seasons; providing moral guidance; engaging in family devotions; and reading the Bible. When we invite God into our family activities, we grow in

faith, recognize God’s presence and love in our lives, and experience home life as holy. Parishes are crucial here (see p. 4).

These faith practices are significant for growing and deepening the faith of your whole household:

- Engage in caring conversations.
- Celebrate rituals and traditions.
- Learn and apply the Catholic faith to your daily lives.
- Pray together.
- Read the Bible.
- Serve those in need.

When families follow these practices, children and teens see the lived faith of their parents (and grandparents) in the midst of everyday life. The household becomes a living “laboratory” for cultivating and nurturing the growing faith of young disciples.

In generations past, religious activities were more naturally part of family life—passed on from generation to generation and supported by ethnic traditions. Today, a Catholic family must intentionally choose to plant and nurture faith practices. This can happen in the rhythm and flow of life: through the day—mealtimes, car times, morning and bedtime, exits and entries, sharing times; through key moments—times of joy and sorrow, good times and hard times; through the year—Church seasons, rituals, and celebrations; and through rites of passage—sacramental, educational, and age milestones (e.g., driver’s license, retirement).



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Reflect

- How can I use these faith practices to enrich my own faith life and that of my family?
- How can I share these faith practices with others beyond my own family?

3. INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships and experiences across generations—within our parishes and beyond—can nurture the faith of people of all ages, especially younger generations. If we want to inspire deep and growing faith in children and youth, we need to help them build webs of relationships with committed, faithful, and caring adults. Intergenerational relationships and faith experiences provide a foundation for vital, committed faith in the young adult years.

Children and youth must develop strong, personal identities for faith to stick, and an intergenerational community helps them do just that. Whether it's family, friends, or the parish, building connections into the lives of the younger generation creates a network of caring supporters. These relationships aid in the self-discovery process and keep young people growing in faith for the long haul. Parents and parishes need to work together to mentor young people into vital Catholic faith.

All ages benefit from intergenerational activities—worship, service, learning, retreats, and more. These foster understanding and respect across generations, teach us to care for one another, and create relationships in which we can share our faith stories and engage in practices that deepen faith.

Reflect

- How can I be a role model for children and teens in my parish?
- How can I or my family engage in intergenerational activities that connect the generations in the parish or wider community?

BLUEPRINTS

BOOKS

- *Handbook for Today's Catholic*, Revised Edition (also available in Spanish), Liguori Publications
- *Handbook for Today's Catholic Family*, Revised Edition (also available in Spanish), Liguori Publications
- *Faith Reference Essential Library*, Liguori Publications
- *We Believe: A Survey of the Catholic Faith* by Oscar Lukefahr, CM, Liguori Publications
- *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, USCCB
- *A Well-Built Faith* by Joe Paprocki, Loyola Press

ONLINE

- Adult Catechism Videos, USCCB: www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/evangelization
- Church in the 21st Century Online (C21), Boston College: www.bc.edu/schools/stm/c21online
- Satellite Theological Education Program (STEP), University of Notre Dame: <http://step.nd.edu>
- Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF), University of Dayton: <http://vlc.udayton.edu>

TOOLS FOR BUILDING

- Between Sundays: www.thefiveaves.com
- *The Busy Family's Guide to Spirituality* by David Robinson, Crossroad
- *Modeling Faith at Home* by Kass Dotterweich, Liguori Publications
- www.CatholicMom.com
- *52 Simple Ways to Talk with Your Kids about Faith* by Jim Campbell, Loyola Press
- *Fostering Children's Faith* by Jeanne Hall, Resource Publications
- *The Catholic Mom: Nurturing Your Household* by Kathleen Blease, Liguori Publications
- *Sharing the Faith with Your Child: From Birth to Age Four*, Liguori Publications
- *Keep Talking: Daily Conversation Starters for the Family Meal* by Maureen Treacy Lahr and Julie Pfitzinger, Liguori Publications
- *Real Kids, Real Faith* by Karen Marie Yust, Jossey-Bass
- www.vibrantfaithathome.org
- *Live Catholic: Practical Ways to Build Strong Families* (DVD and CD-ROM) National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, Liguori Publications

DIG DEEPER

What do you now understand about evangelization that you didn't before reading this article?

How well do you share your personal faith with others—your family, friends, coworkers, faith community? What holds you back?

What one action will you take to increase your efforts to evangelize?

4. PARISH COMMUNITY

We learn what it means to live as Catholics by participating in a parish that consistently lives out this life—in its worship, prayer, teaching, service, caring, witnessing, and more. Participation in a community in which everyone can experience a lived Catholic faith, think and reflect with others about the faith, and join together in mission and outreach to the world deepens our faith. These activities equip us to live our faith in everyday life.

When we're engaged as individuals and families in this community of practice, the parish demonstrates what it means to live as disciples of Jesus Christ today. This type of parish models and teaches younger generations what it means to live as Catholics. It attracts people who share the parish's vision and mission, join the parish in its practices, and live its life.

Reflect

- How can I immerse myself or my family more deeply into the life and faith practices of our parish?
- How can I invite friends, family, and neighbors who have strayed from the practice of the Catholic faith to join us?

5. ONLINE CONTENT AND CONNECTIONS

We live in an age that offers an abundance of faith-forming content, activities, and experiences in digital form. We now have e-books, apps, videos, and online resource centers where we can find the Bible, Bible studies, Catholic faith practices, Catholic traditions, daily prayer and spiritual disciplines, courses in Catholic theology, parenting knowledge and skills, and so much more. New digital content and activities are personal, participatory, and portable (via phones, tablets, and laptops)—and available 24/7/365.

We can now weave these faith activities into our daily lives—as individuals and families—in ways previously unimaginable. Whether at home, school, or work, in the car, on vacation, or at a sports field waiting for our children, we can learn, pray, celebrate rituals, read the Bible, and so much more. And social media tools allow us to connect with each other, build relationships, share faith, and learn together anytime and anywhere.

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Reflect

- How can I use new digital tools and resources to deepen and enrich my own faith life?
- How might I use these resources to encourage and enhance my family's growth in faith?

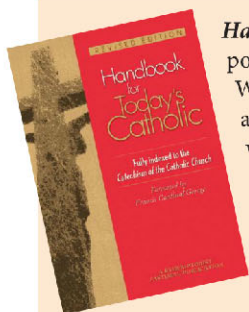
IT'S TIME TO BUILD!

Parents, families, intergenerational relationships, parishes, and online content and connections—these five building blocks help the Catholic faith flourish in our lives, families, and communities. The work of evangelization is for us all! At its most basic, the heart of evangelization is having a living relationship with Jesus Christ, living our Catholic faith at home and in the world, being part of a parish we love, and caring that people outside the parish find what we've discovered.

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John Roberto of LifelongFaith Associates is a respected consultant, teacher, and author in the field of faith formation. He is project coordinator of the Faith Formation Learning Exchange and 21st Century Faith Formation websites. His latest publication is Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation.

KEEP THE FAITH



Handbook for Today's Catholic, Revised Edition, popular for decades, is now even more valuable. With sections on beliefs, practices, prayers, and Vatican II, this affordable resource will be welcomed by participants in RCIA and parish adult faith-formation groups, high school religious-education classes, and anyone who wants to have the essentials of Catholicism at their fingertips. Paperback: 126 pages • 812200 eBook • 860072

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