

How to Share the Christian Faith with your Children

- 1. Lead by example.** Children learn mostly by imitating what they see their parents doing on a consistent basis. Therefore it is important to live out your faith visibly and in an authentic way. Do not be afraid to let your children see you praying alone. Help your children discover the dignity of the human person by modeling good behavior such as giving alms to the poor, visiting a sick relative, helping a neighbor repair their house, accompanying grandparents and doing small services for them. If your children see you praying, reading your bible, offering forgiveness etc. they will be more inclined to do likewise.
- 2. Spend quality time with your children building mutual relationships.** Only in a shared life can we transmit to our children what is dearest to us. Making use of family nights, shared family meals, face to face discussion etc. will show your children how much you value them and give them a sense of security, love and self-esteem. Watching T.V. together or going to movies is probably not the best way to spend quality time together. Rather, genuine meaningful interaction by listening to your children and discussing current events in the light of the values and beliefs of the Catholic faith is preferable. Avoid the temptation to “outsource” your children to other institutions thereby delegating your responsibility to teach your children the Catholic faith. In our busy culture it is too easy to allow institutions (day care centers, schools, etc), associations (after school programs, peer groups, dance classes etc), and entertainment sources (media) to form our children. At the same time attendance at a Catholic school is a true support to an active Catholic family and the Catholic education system should be supported. There is a place for some extra curricular activities, but you are the primary educator of the faith to your children and this only happens when you spend quality personal time listening to and engaging your children in their world and what matters most to them.
- 3. Pray together.** Aside from prayer before meals, there are many sacred family moments in which prayer can be inserted including feast days, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, baptism and other sacramental and

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family celebrations. Start when your children are very young and just learning to speak by saying bedtime prayers and simple thanksgiving prayers before meals. Prayer then becomes second nature to your children and this comfort level will serve them well when they get older and need to discern difficult choices in life.

4. **Create together with your children a “family mission statement” that identifies what kind of family you want to be.** Recognize that you are a domestic church that should have values and objectives to bring out the best in you children. Refer often to the mission statement in your family meetings to review how these goals are being attained and do not be afraid to revise the statement as time passes. Perhaps you could even craft a short family motto, no longer than one sentence, which summarizes the mission statement and is easy to remember. In this way you will be creating a family culture that will have a positive influence on your children and society. For example, part of the mission statement may emphasize social justice and compassion towards the marginalized. Parents and children acting on the mission statement can take a countercultural stance against the distorted values of a society that rewards greed and opulent consumption. The entire family can intentionally avoid the allurements of advertisements by not accumulating the latest named apparel, designer shoes, and household gimmicks. Instead money can be set aside each week for the support of a third world family that is on the edge of existence. These object lessons in charity communicate tangibly and visibly the faith to your children.

5. **Read scripture together as a family.** Believe that the Word of God has the power to transform your children’s lives. Reading a chapter of the bible before dinner or at a set time each day will provide rich spiritual resources to young children. Give opportunity for all to participate in discussing the meaning of each passage especially as pertaining to their personal lives. A good plan would be to read at the beginning of each week the upcoming Sunday Gospel and have your children comment on how it applies today. This will help the Mass come alive because your children will be prepared to engage the readings and homily.

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6. **Teach your children not only about the faith but how to think critically and make good choices.** Don't just make the decisions for them but engage your children in thinking about issues from a moral, spiritual, and ethical perspective. This can be done in a number of ways. First by asking them questions about current events in the community or in their lives. Second by teaching them to ask God, what should I do in this particular situation? Third, by giving your children responsibility early in life. Children naturally want to help their parents. By giving them tasks, they can learn to be responsible, self reliant and thoughtful. Through these steps we don't just allow the culture to shape our children, rather our children shape the culture by thinking critically and acting responsibly.
7. **Have a happy home and marriage.** Children learn best in an environment of security and love. Humor, joy and time for relaxation/pleasure till the soil of our hearts so that they will be open and receptive to the goodness of God. It is important for parents therefore to love each other. When children see their parents love and respect each other, that security makes them flourish. Single parents also can provide a happy home life building loving relationships with extended family. These relationships with a number of relatives create familial bonds that model commitment, sacrifice, and the offering of our lives as gift to each other. How a family lives together can deepen a child's understanding of their baptismal belonging and responsibility to God's Family, the Church.
8. **Take your children to Church every Sunday and make the day special** either by going out for Sunday Brunch or visiting relatives or some other family event. Talk about what Father said in the homily or some aspect of the readings after every Mass so that your children learn to be attentive and listen to what has been said.
9. Genuine sharing of daily life within the family, physically, emotionally, and spiritually means that the likelihood of indifference and rejection is very real. Thus there is room for the cross in marriage as members bear one another's faults and reach out beyond personal, ego-centric boundaries to risk generous love. Part of carrying one's cross means dying to self in seeking to transform their inner estrangement through repentance, mutual forgiveness, and reconciliation. Thus, **it is important that the family**

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celebrates together the Sacrament of Reconciliation, being led to an encounter with God, who is rich in mercy. This regular reconciliation will strengthen family communion which in itself is a powerful witness to our present day culture of divorce. In addition, it teaches the family members to extend more freely to others words of forgiveness.

10. **Finally the priesthood of the family might also include parents speaking a blessing over their children on a regular basis**, expressing their love of each child. This is an ancient practice that is rooted in the tradition of the Church and is deeply biblical. An example is Jacob blessing his son Joseph in Genesis 49: 22-28. Such words of affirmation and encouragement can have a powerful impact on the child's esteem especially given the negative environment children can be exposed to at school or through the media.