

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE FAMILY

### TEN BASICS FOR REACHING OUT TO FAMILIES

#### 1. TEACH THE IDEAL IN RELATION TO REALITY



The art of ministry is the ability to comfort the challenged and challenge the comfortable. The fundamental role of religious formation is to teach an ideal in relation to reality which rarely lives up to that ideal. The need for “pastoral judgment” reminds us that compromise must be examined. In this ever-changing world, small compromises from the ideal may mean the difference between the perception of an uncaring church and allowing further contact and continuing conversion. It must also be remembered, however, that compromise can be a slippery-slope.

#### 2. PARENTS ARE FAITH MODELS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

The shared faith experience between parent and child is of paramount importance to the handing on of religious practices. Parent participation and interest is the difference between a child’s program attendance and involved family faith formation. Program requirements therefore, must remain flexible and pastoral in responding to family needs while at the same time challenging the family to live up to its responsibility.

#### 3. INCLUDE THE LAITY IN PLANNING

Many adults, especially “Boomers,” distrust authority. Parents sharing their experiences create a sense of community and authenticate what practitioners and theoreticians are promoting.

#### 4. LISTEN

Parents want to be heard. The starting point of all dialogue is to listen. Discern parents’ religious and sacramental understanding and then meeting them there understanding that conversion is a life-long process.

#### 5. PROVIDE VISIBLE SUPPORT

Support and understanding of the pastoral team is crucial. Parish staffs need to be united in their perspectives of sacraments and religious education. The pastoral staff’s unity serves the entire parish community as a model for their own involvement in the religious education and sacramental life of the parish.

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#### 6. ENCOURAGE PARISH REGISTRATION

Registration at a parish as a requisite for religious education or reception of a sacrament demonstrates a commitment on the part of the family. However, basing the depth of one's commitment on the amount put in the collection basket sends a different message. While financial support of the parish is important, it does not preclude one's desire to participate in religious education or to participate in the sacraments.

#### 7. MASS ATTENDANCE

The Church desires and encourages that every member have a great love for the Eucharist and obliges the faithful to participate in Mass every Sunday and holy-day of obligation; however, the notion of Mass attendance as a requirement for religious education or reception of the sacraments is not found in the Church teaching. The Church must be cautious in mandating a coerced spirituality especially when this excludes minor children.

#### 8. BE SENSITIVE TO SPECIAL REQUESTS

An attempt to set all encompassing rules and policies is shortsighted especially given the diverse life-style of contemporary families. Sensitivity and flexibility to families may require shifts in the structure and form of catechetics.

#### 9. DELAY, BUT NEVER REFUSE, A SACRAMENT

Vatican directives are explicit about this. Fr. Champlin would say that a delay can be challenging or crushing depending on the approach and the reception. Delaying a child's reception of the sacrament because his or her parents have a limited sacramental understanding speaks to the ideal, but the reality may preclude a teachable moment and forever close the door for both adult and child.

#### 10. KEEP THE LIFE-DEATH-RESURRECTION EXPERIENCE IN FOCUS

Adults must find a Church that invites them into ever deepening relationship with both Christ and the Church. This requires that some things will need to be "let go of" in favor of new perspectives. This is the process of on-going conversion into the mind and heart of Christ.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE FAMILY

### STRATEGIES FOR BEING “FAMILY FRIENDLY”

#### KEEP PARENTS AND FAMILIES INFORMED

- Family/Parent Newsletter
- Community Calendar
- Parish and Community Awareness Raisers

#### OFFER PARENTS MEANINGFUL

#### ROLES IN PROGRAM/CLASSROOM

- Parent Advisory Group/Board of Religious Education
- Classroom Parent
- Program Assistant



#### CONSULT WITH PARENTS

- Use a formal needs assessment
- Survey/ask what they expect from program/class
- Not every change requires consensus - but who does not want to be heard

#### PROVIDE IN-HOME RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

- Recommend videos/movies
- Send home meaningful, timely projects
- Send home information so that the family can follow-up on lessons

#### PROVIDE INDEPENDENT FAMILY PROJECTS

- Consider Advent and Lenten Activities for families
- Consider a summer Bible school for families

#### CONSIDER A PARALLEL FAMILY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

- No one model can meet all needs - consider alternatives
- Review Kathy Chesto's FIRE Program
- Review major publishers family programs

#### CONNECT MINISTRY PROGRAMMING/LESSONS WITH FAMILY LIFE

- Bridge experiences and family take-home activities
- Re-entry experiences (following retreat experiences)

#### PARENT/FAMILY COMPONENT

- Build in opportunities for parents to be involved in lessons, esp. on values, family issues, relationships, etc.

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### STRATEGIES FOR BEING “FAMILY FRIENDLY”, CON’T

#### PROVIDE A VARIETY OF PARENT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Incorporate parent education into existing programs

Sponsor parent workshops and parenting classes

#### DEVELOP A FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

Parenting materials

Children’s activity ideas

Suggestions for day trips for families

## FAMILY SENSITIVITY IN CHILDREN’S CATECHESIS

**The following questions may be valuable for catechetical leaders, parents and catechists to consider and discuss.**

Does your program address only the child’s needs, or the needs of children relating to his or her family, or the overall needs of the entire family?

What underlying attitudes concerning the family situation are built into your program (e.g., regarding single, blended, dual career families, etc.)?

Does your program have a process that helps children and their families deal with the change and growth your program may encourage?

How are parents involved in program planning, implementation and evaluation?

How does your program improve the capacity for young families to master the challenging developmental issues of this stage in family life?

How does your program improve the relationship between the parish and young families?

What is one immediate adjustment your program can implement to become more family sensitive?

What is one long-term goal your program can incorporate to increase its family sensitivity?

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### POSSIBLE FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Adopted Grandparents	First Aid Classes
Animal Obedience Classes	Game Nights
Bike Safety	Home Improvements – Do it yourself
Blood Drives	Home Safety
Catholic Perspective on Human Sexuality	Indoor Playground
Child Safety	Infant CPR Classes
Children Theater – Puppets	Inter-Generational Activities
Christmas Craft Day	Local Candidates Night
Family Budgeting	Ministry Workshop
Ecology Days	Parish Blood Bank
Family Cooking Classes	Parish Youth-Sharing Night
Family Counseling	Retirement Planning
Family Activity Days (Seasonal)	Single Parents Workshops
Family Gardening	Teaching Table Etiquette
Family Journaling	The Art of Storytelling
Family Movie Night	Toy Lending Library
Family Nutrition	Tracing your Family Roots
Family Resource Library	Technology “How To” Workshop
Family Social Issues Seminar	“Technology and Your Family” Workshop
Financial Aid – Saving for College	Voter Registration