Introduction

Coaching Parents to Form their Own Children through Whole Family Catechesis

What We Know: “The family as a locus of catechesis has a unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values... It is, indeed a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured into periods.” (GDC, 255)

But parents need our help. “At the same time, the Church promises to help parents foster their children’s faith and assists them specifically in their role as catechists of their children, whether they assume complete responsibility themselves or look to the parish school or religious education program for help and support.” (NDC, 54C)

What To Do: As parish leaders and catechists, developing a partnership with parents is a privileged responsibility and a blessing, a blessing for the families that will be touched through such parish support, and a blessing for the family of faith, the parish community. Coaching parents to form their own children in our faith is a way of partnering with parents that will help them to develop and nurture an intimate relationship with God and each other. For more on this essential topic, please read Great Expectations: A Pastoral Guide for Partnering with Parents. This easy-to-read handbook provides the foundations for faith formation or catechesis events, such as the one outline here.

Why This Is Important: Whole Family Catechesis or Faith Formation Events are a means for the pastor, catechetical leader and catechists to provide parents with the support they need in order to live faith in their homes. The meetings are intended to help parents feel the support of a loving parish community that cares about them. This is extremely important! Engaging people in the process of faith formation through such events will have the vital effect of helping the family to feel they truly belong and are of value within the community of believers while equipping parents to live and teach their faith at home. By coaching parents in the context of events at the parish, we are building a lasting connection between the domestic church, the family, and the community of believers, the Body of Christ.

How This Works: The Whole Family Catechesis or Faith Formation Event that is outlined in this resource:

- Introduces parents to essential themes of our faith;
- Gives parents an opportunity to share with and teach their children, guided by a coach;
Offer parents an opportunity to learn and share with each other;
Provides parents with ideas for infusing their households with living faith;

This event is for:
- Families with children of all ages, seated together.
- Other adults who attend without children.
- Youth and young adults from the parish.

Because we want to coach parents to form their own children, group them together as much as possible.
- If one parent with one child attends, group these two with other like family groups, for example.
- If a family attends with several children, form one group for them alone.
- Group youth or young adults together as much as possible.
- For adults with no children, form groups of like people, or sprinkle them throughout the groups, depending on your situation.

Form groups of 5 to 8 people, as a rule. Try to form groups of the same size so the sharing times will be somewhat uniform. (Larger groups will need more time than smaller ones, throwing off your timing.)

Note that the content in this event outline is addressed mainly to adults, who are then invited to share it with their own children. This is how the faith is passed from generation to generation.

Background:
This resource will help you organize a meeting in your parish at which you can coach parents to teach and form their own children through a Whole Family Catechesis or Faith Formation Event. This outline includes:

- Prayer and Introduction of the Theme for the meeting
- Optional: dismissal for young children
- The complete theological talking points for you as catechist
- Handouts
- Evaluation sheet

The meeting is designed to take approximately 60-75 minutes.

Materials to have ready from the parish or school:
- Nametags & markers
- Signs to welcome and announce the event
- Pens or pencils and writing paper on each table, three-hole punched
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- A bible for each table
- A prayer table, located centrally
- PowerPoint equipment and screen (optional)
- A Microphone and lectern (optional)
- Piano and instruments (optional)
- A Lectionary

To the Planners:
- The handout for tonight’s meeting is at the end of each packet. You have permission to reproduce it for use at this event.
- The first page of each handout is marked with this icon.
- There is an evaluation form in this packet to be used at the end of the evening.

For the Whole Family Catechesis or Faith Formation Event:
- Prepare several “roaming catechists” who will be available to coach the parents during the family sharing time.
  - Roaming catechists are “extras” in the room who keep an eye on what’s happening and can step in if a family seems to be lost or having trouble.
  - They should be very discreet and limit their interventions to the minimum. In general, it’s best to allow family groups to work their own way through these exercises.
  - Choose people as roaming catechists who can be subtle and gentle with folks. Avoid those who tend to say too much.

- All leaders should read through this event outline well in advance.
- All leaders should be familiar the theology for each topic, which is included in the outline and is drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- It’s important that the leader of the event not read our suggested texts word for word. The material we supply is as a sample only. The leader should use his or her own words but cover all the major points in our outlines.
Room Set-up suggestions

- Keep the lighting low and friendly. Bright lights can be intimidating!
- As much as possible, make this a welcoming space!
- While the prayer time will be brief, having a well-prepared prayer space will properly set the tone for the gathering. Use the color for the liturgical season and a candle to focus the space for prayer.
- The best set-up will be with tables (either long or round will work fine) and chairs. Invite people who come with family members to sit together. If you use long tables, invite families to cluster at the ends of a table like this:

![Room Set-up diagram]

Gather and Welcome
30 minutes (prior to presentation)

This is an opportunity to welcome people who are new to the meetings as well as those who have participated in the past. Remember that it is often true that people who attend may not regularly attend Mass. Many come to these meetings to support their children. We want to make them feel welcome and comfortable here.

- Design a large poster welcoming everyone and announcing the gathering theme “Where Do You Meet God?”
- Supply name tags for everyone, including the pastor and staff.
- Provide beverages and snacks.
- Prepare three volunteer readers in advance, and provide them with the passage each will read (in the opening introduction to tonight’s topic).
• Ask all your volunteers to arrive 15 minutes early, in order to be ready to welcome all the participants as they arrive. They should keep introducing people to one another as new people arrive.
• Greet people at the door and provide childcare for those who want it.
• The Pastor and staff should move freely about the room as people arrive, and be seated at one of the tables among the participants for the process. Encourage them not to stand at the perimeter of the room as “sightseers” because this often makes participants uncomfortable.
• Play *God is Here*, or another appropriate hymn, softly as everyone arrives. Keep the lights turned low and have each table ready with tonight’s supplies and décor.

Your Notes