

Family Catechesis
Archdiocesan Family Forum

I. What is Catechesis?

- “Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways” (*General Directory for Catechesis*, Congregation for Clergy, #105). “The name of *catechesis* was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God...and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, John Paul II, #1).

II. Why Family Catechesis?

- The Capacity of the Family: Parents (grandparents) as Educators: “Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators. [*Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education), #3 – Vatican II, Paul VI, 1965] “The witness of Christian life given by parents in the family comes to children with tenderness and parental respect. Children thus perceive and joyously live the closeness of God and of Jesus made manifest by their parents in such a way that this first Christian experience frequently leaves decisive traces which last throughout life. This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable” [*General Directory for Catechesis*, #226]. See also *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II, #36.

- The Excellence of the Family: School of Love/Domestic Church: “The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint deliberation of spouses, as well as the painstaking cooperation of parents in the education of their children” [(*Gaudium et spes*, 52) – Vatican II]. The Christian family is ordinarily the first experience of the Christian community and the primary environment for growth in faith. Because it is the “church of the home” (FC, no 11), the family provides a unique *locus* for catechesis. It is a place in which the word of God is received and from which it is extended. With the Christian family, parents are the primary educators in the faith and “the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children” (LG, no. 11). But all the members make up the family, and each can make a unique contribution to creating the basic environment in which a sense of God’s loving presence is awakened and faith in Jesus Christ is confessed, encouraged, and lived.” (*National Directory for Catechesis*, USCCB, 29)

-The Catechetical Content: “The family as a locus of catechesis has an 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 the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God the Father, the Creator. It is, indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going and daily than structured into periods. In this family catechesis, *the role of grandparents is of growing importance*. Their wisdom and sense of the religious is often times decisive in creating a true Christian climate.” [*General Directory for Catechesis*, 225].

III. A “re-fresher” for Parents and Grandparents

- A humiliating fact: *Nemo dat quod non habet* – No one gives what they do not have. There is a difference between want and willing. The need for holiness – wholeness of life.

- An anthropological principle and its corollary: We are transformed by what we do. We are forming or deforming our capacity for excellence.

- The need to develop divine life in children: Faith, Hope and Love – Live with a sacramental vision. Correspondence b/w parish and family. **“So great and splendid is the educational ministry of Christian parents that Saint Thomas has no hesitation in comparing it with the ministry of priests:** ‘Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of the sacrament of Orders; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is brought about by the sacrament of marriage, by which a man and a woman join in order to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God’” (FC, 38).

- Research from Robert Wuthnow (*Growing Up Religious*): 1) Eating: Family Meal—eating together, saying grace before meals, sharing information about our lives—is one of the most potent ways of forming faith; 2) Sleeping: Bedtime rituals and prayer; 3) Having conversations: Talk of values, character, and holiness; 4) Sacred objects/religious images; 5) Celebrating the holidays; 6) Moral instruction; 7) Being part of a faith community; 8) Family devotions and reading the Bible; 9) Role of generations (grandparents)

Addendum: Catechism of the Catholic Church

1653. The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children. In this sense the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life.

1656. In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are "by word and example ...the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children."

2221. The fecundity of conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children, but must extend to their moral education and their spiritual formation. "The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute." The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable.

2223. Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues.