



Dear Parents,

In an effort to support you in your work providing a foundation of faith for your children that they can hopefully draw on throughout life, I offer the ideas below. While these can apply to all children, I am particularly talking to parents who have children with an autism spectrum disorder or other developmental disability, because as with everything else, it seems you have to work harder than other parents at the task. At best, this is sometimes without the help of your church, and other times it is seemingly at odds with it. However, it is truly the desire of your church to support you and walk with you on this journey and it is your right that we should do so.

You have probably often heard that parents are the primary examples of religious faith in a child's life. No matter how unqualified you may feel about this, the love you give to your child each day: the sacrifices you make, the nurturing of your child's spirit, the limits set and teaching right from wrong, these are all seeds of God's love that you plant in your sons and daughters. In fact a child's image of God typically reflects their experience of their parents love.

The ideas suggested below are just some possibilities. Don't worry about trying to do them all or trying to do them perfectly. Pick one thing that catches your attention and seems easy to do. If it doesn't go as you had hoped or expected, DON'T WORRY! Faith, like all of life, is a journey and our journey is part of who we are (even though there are often parts we would like to skip!). That applies to how long it takes for your son or daughter to learn a prayer, behavior, or whatever. Whether it takes ten days or five years, it doesn't matter. The fact that you are doing what you can is all that counts. They, and we, have a life time for this journey.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

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FAITH AT HOME

Sharing Our Faith with Our Children – Some Possibilities

Ritual is comforting for people of all ages, and in particular for people with developmental disabilities. The most productive rituals are those in which everyone can participate in their own way. Do you practice rituals of the Catholic faith in your home? (I ask this also knowing that there are some days, that at the end of the day, you look back and wonder how everyone survived!)

Some people wonder about how to explain God to a child who thinks only in concrete terms. However, all children are concrete thinkers. Maybe your son or daughter will always be so, but still share your sense of wonder and awe at God's activity in your life, in good and bad times. Develop a picture library of associations you have about God, such as parts of creation, expressions of love, comfort and support, ...

Although coming together as a community for Eucharist is at the center of who we are as Catholics, incorporating some of the rituals of our faith into our home helps to join the details of our daily life with our faith and our Eucharistic celebrations on Sunday. It also helps our children grow up with a sense of God in our lives, and an experience of faith to draw from. Some possibilities to consider are below. Maybe pick one as a place to start:

- ♥ When you eat together at the table...
 - ✦ try to encourage everyone to take part in the process of preparation, no matter how small.
 - ✦ try to include everyone in the conversation, even if by reference.
 - ✦ try to have a relaxed environment (remember, these are *goals!*)

- ♥ Make time to pray together as a family...
 - ✦ ...in the morning
 - ✦ ...in the evening
 - ✦ ...before meals
 - ✦ ... "the bed-time ritual"
 - ✦ ...for strength and guidance in hard times
 - ✦ ...to give thanks in good times
 - ✦ ...just to praise God
 - ✦ ... Does your child see you spending quiet time with God?

- ♥ Acknowledge special seasons of the Church year such as: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, feast day of a favorite saint...with family rituals.

- ♥ Have sign(s) of our Catholic faith in your home, for example a crucifix or cross, a Bible...

- ♥ Find books with stories of our faith that have good pictures for your child. Even if there are too many words, you can adapt the text as you read it. Think of how these stories have been important in your life and share that with your children.

- ♥ Prayer can be spontaneous, simple conversation with our God. However, if your son or daughter has expressive language challenges, focus on prayers that are used in Mass and/or that involve the body, such as the Our Father and making the sign of the cross. These can be prayed at home and in the Mass.

"FAITH AT HOME" WORK

Some Tips for Parents

- ✦ Say basic prayers every night with your child.
- ✦ Listen to religious songs with your child.
- ✦ Play a matching game with pictures of people important in the Church and your parish.
- ✦ Take photographs of important elements and places in your church. Make flash cards out of them or a "Church Tour."
- ✦ Visit your church with your child when no one is around.
- ✦ Have the child match the picture to the actual object in your church.
- ✦ Tell the child how long the Mass or liturgy will be.
- ✦ Incorporate Catholic ritual and expressions of faith into your home and family life as much as possible