

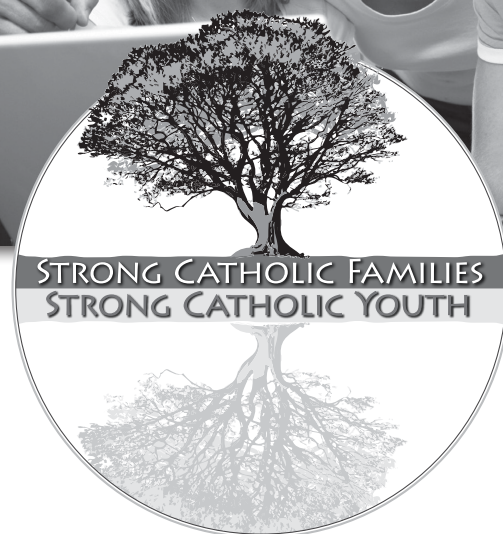
# Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth

*Family Faith Resource Booklet*



“The single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.”

*Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of America's Teenagers*



Dear Parents,

Thank you for holding fast to the gift of faith. Your commitment to your children is a witness that you consider our Catholic faith to be a precious gift that must intentionally be passed on to the next generation. This task is not simple or easy, especially given all the stresses, busyness, and demands of our lives. The materials in this resource booklet are intended to support you in passing on this vital gift of faith.

You are not alone. Parents all over this country are standing up to make their families and children stronger through faith. The NFCYM joins you and all parents as partners in growing strong Catholic children by building strong Catholic families.

Your Partners in Faith at the:

- National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry ([www.nfcym.org](http://www.nfcym.org))
- National Conference for Catechetical Leadership ([www.nccl.org](http://www.nccl.org))
- National Catholic Educational Association ([www.ncea.org](http://www.ncea.org))
- National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers ([www.nacflm.org](http://www.nacflm.org))



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
CATHOLIC FAMILY LIFE MINISTERS  
*Strengthening the Church's commitment to families*

## Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth Family Faith Resource Booklet

This booklet is often used as part of the Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth three-part training process for enhancing the way faith communities partner with parents. It was developed by the NFCYM and is presented in partnership with the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL) and the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers (NACFLM).

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### Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the funding support provided by the ACTA Foundation to develop this resource.

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“Living Faith within the Family” by Greg “Dobie” and Lisa Moser, Cleveland. Used with permission.

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## My Wish . . .

What impact I want the Catholic faith to have in the lives of my child(ren) in their adulthood:

# Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth

By Michael Theisen, NFCYM

## Getting There from Here

Imagine spending an hour talking one-on-one with a young person about what she believes about God, faith, and religion and what that looks like in her life, and then having a similar conversation with her parent. Those conversations would likely yield some surprising insights, stories, challenges, and reflections. Now multiply those two conversations by over 3,300 and you get a glimpse into what Dr. Christian Smith and colleagues encountered in their groundbreaking research study on youth and religion in the United States. This National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), first conducted from 2001-2005, provides church leaders and parents a challenging and profound glimpse into what today's teens believe and how they act in light of those beliefs. Of the mountain of data collected and analyzed in this vital study, five findings are crucial to parents in understanding what it will take to build strong families today and in the years ahead.

### 1. Parents Matter

Perhaps the most prominent finding of the NSYR research involves the role of the parent. Smith found that the *single most important influence* on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. In analyzing responses, the researchers found numerous parent-teen “mirrors,” showing a clear and accurate reflection between what the parents did and believed and what their teens did and believed. With this insight, the role and faith of the parents (especially for Anglo families<sup>1</sup>) became a critical factor in most of the outcomes studied as well as the pivotal touchstone to changing the status quo.

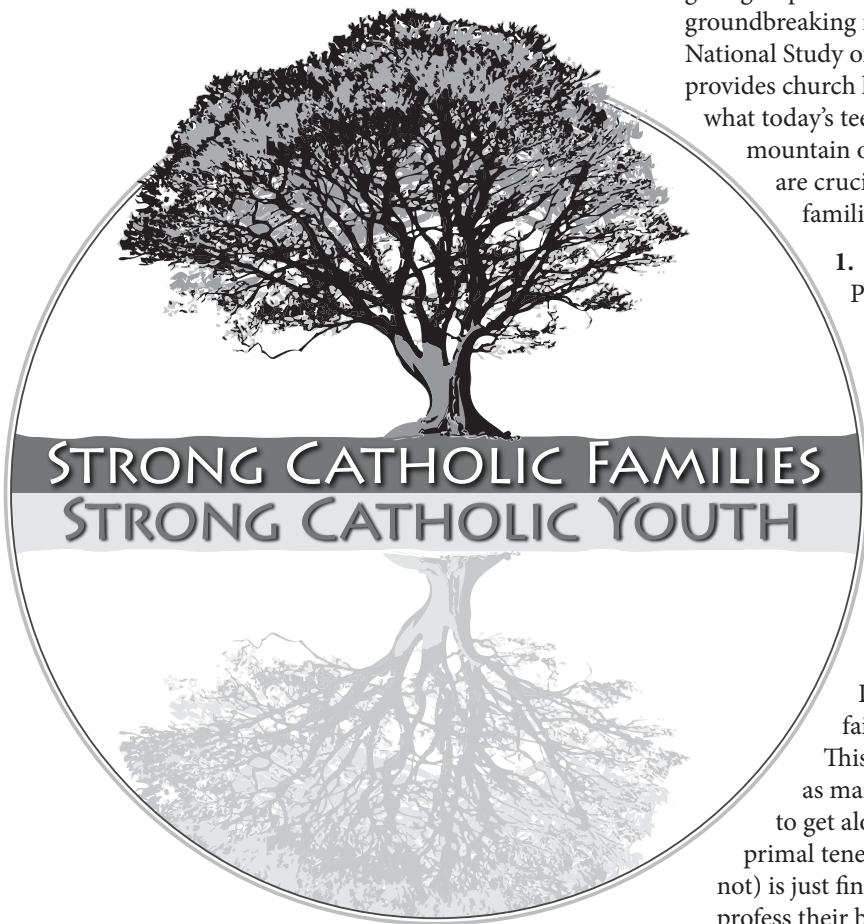
### 2. Whatever!

Despite what we may think, the research found that most teens' faith is very conventional and, unfortunately, relatively harmless. This generation of young people is not seeking to “rock the boat” as many in previous generations did; rather they want to go along to get along. *Whatever* is both a major part of their vocabulary and a primal tenet of their belief system. Whatever one chooses to believe (or not) is just fine with most teens. While an overwhelming percentage of teens profess their belief in God (84 percent of Catholic youth) and some actually show up in church, there is little evidence that faith goes much deeper than that for the majority of teens.

### 3. The Power of Faith

The other side of the belief coin shows that “religious faith and practice themselves exert significant, positive, direct and indirect influences on the lives of teenagers, helping to foster healthier, more engaged adolescents who live more constructive and promising lives” (Smith 2005, 263). Teens that practice and develop their faith beyond a superficial level appear happier and healthier than those who do not. And what parent does not want that outcome for their children?

Smith found that this same “success” extends to faith communities as well. Those parishes who “prioritize ministry to youth and support for their parents, invest in trained and skilled youth group leaders, and make a serious effort to engage and teach adolescents seem much more likely to draw youth into their religious lives and to foster religious and spiritual maturity in their



young members” (Smith 2005, 261-262). The bottom line is that faith works and the more resources the church can put into engaging teens in practicing their faith, the more faith-filled our churches will become.

#### 4. We’re Number 5!

One of the more surprising findings from the NSYR research is where Catholic teens ranked among Christian denominations in regard to living and practicing their faith. When specific religious behaviors like reading Scripture or praying alone, attending mission trips, retreats, youth group, or religious services were examined, the rankings appeared like this:

1. Mormons
2. Conservative Protestant
3. Black Protestant
4. Mainline Protestant
5. Catholic
6. Jewish
7. Non-Religious

Sadly, Catholics fell to the very bottom of the list when compared to the other Christian denominations.

#### 5. Faith as a Foreign Language

The NSYR found that the vast majority of teens are “... incredibly inarticulate about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices, and its meaning or place in their lives” (Soul Searching, 131). Not only do most teens struggle to talk about their faith or use the language of faith, but researchers reported that many of the beliefs teens recalled were, “from the official perspectives of their own religious traditions at least, positively erroneous” (Smith 2005, 262). During these NSYR interviews, youth frequently mentioned that their one hour conversation with researchers about what they believed was the first time any adult had even approached the subject with them.

The solution? Parents should engage children and teens in meaningful and regular faith conversations that incorporate aspects of what they believe and why. Could any of us learn to speak a new language by taking a one or two hour class a few times a month? The class certainly helps, but it is not going to get us speaking and understanding the language. Our Catholic faith is no different. If faith conversations are not happening in the home or teens are not engaged in them at church, learning to speak the language of faith and developing a deeper faith will remain an uphill battle.

### A New Course to an Old Destination

Albert Einstein said that “no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” If we are to move forward in faith, we have to start thinking, acting, and believing in different ways. But to change for change’s sake is reckless. Thankfully, our church guides us in this direction. In the 1997 document, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, the bishops of the United States assert that “all ministry with adolescents must be directed toward presenting young people with the Good News of Jesus Christ and inviting and challenging them to become his disciples” (USCCB 1997, 10). In other words, it is all about discipleship, about trying to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and loving God and neighbor with heart, soul, and mind. Discipleship involves knowing our faith (mind), believing our faith (heart), and living our faith (hands) in this world.

### The Apprentice

Together, parents, catechists, youth ministry leaders, priests, and bishops journey with our young people along the road of discipleship. This “walking with” approach is known as apprenticing and is one of the major shifts required in faith formation today.

Apprenticing disciples requires an active and hands-on learning and living approach, supported by concrete opportunities to practice discipleship at church, home, school, and in the community. It means that the young person is seen as an active player in the whole system, someone who is expected to put their faith into action by passing it along to others. As parents, how would our interactions, invitations, and engagement with our children and teens change if we believed that our collective role was to help apprentice them as disciples of Jesus Christ?

### Practicing Faith in the Home

The NSYR research identified parents as the most powerful teachers of faith to their children and teens; more powerful than any bishop or priest or youth minister or religious educator and more lasting than any faith formation program. The *National Directory for Catechesis* echoes this fundamental fact, saying “parents are the most influential agents of catechesis for their children” (USCCB 2005, 234).

There are many actions—from simple to profound—that parents can take to create strong Catholic families and youth. Here are a few suggestions:

- Make meal times sacred and invite (apprentice) your children and teens in leading prayer. Use the dinner conversation to talk about daily events and situations, and strive to apply Catholic beliefs and values to them, such as the sacredness of all life, a special option for the poor and marginalized, treating others with respect and dignity, and the belief in an incarnate God who walks with us through life.
- Read and discuss Scripture as a family and invite each member to share what God is saying to them through the Scripture reading.
- Pray together outside of meal times and use simple blessings at night or to commemorate special milestones and events in the lives of family members.
- Display religious art around the house and make sure each person has a Bible of his or her own (geared toward the appropriate age level).



- Expect each person to become actively involved in some form of parish ministry and/or community service. Look for opportunities to serve together as a family.
- Make Mass, youth ministry, faith formation, and church events high family priorities and be sure to update your own faith.

There are numerous other suggestions in the article, “Suggestions for Living Faith as a Family,” found later on in this booklet. The bottom line is to do something and begin now. You do not need to be a Scripture scholar to start reading Scripture and sharing what it means in your life. You do not have to have a degree in theology to talk through a moral dilemma with your children using Catholic values such as respect for life and the dignity of each human being. You do not need to be a lay ecclesial minister to start praying with and for your family. Faith is a daily walk with God, each day getting us a little bit closer to the ultimate mystery that is God. Faith is a lifelong journey, one in which parents, children, and teens walk side by side.

## Next Steps in Family Faith

Given all that has been written thus far, what next steps should your family’s journey of faith take? Included in this booklet are several tools to assist you in determining your family’s next step in faith.

### Family Faith Inventory

Following this article is a short inventory identifying various ways to practice faith in the home. It is not a test; rather a personal assessment to help you determine how your faith is being lived out and in what areas you would like to grow.

To use the inventory, make a copy for each adult and any other family member in the household deemed appropriate. Spend time individually rating each statement. Then go back through the ratings and check the ones that you would like to change in the coming year. Encourage each person to be honest and not answer the way they think others would wish them to respond. Then share the results with one another.

After the parents have completed these steps, come together as a family and talk about the change you wish to see in the coming year and use the next page of the inventory to create your two-step individual and family faith plans. Do not feel that you have to tackle everything at once. Chances are, most of the things you will want to see happen will happen if you start with just a couple of actions, such as sharing meals together, participating in Mass, or spending a few minutes reading Scripture and sharing faith together on a regular basis.

### Faith Sharing Ideas

One of the best ways to grow in faith and use the language of faith at home is through faith sharing. There are many ways to share faith with one another. Several formats are detailed in the “Suggestions for Living Faith as a Family” section (page 12) of this resource. Experiment with each of these, being sure to apprentice your teens in leading the faith sharing moments as well.

### Resources

There are many resources, both in print and online, to assist you as a parent in sharing and passing on the faith to your children and teens. Page 15 lists some of the resources available for Catholic parents and families. Because new resources are created on a regular basis, we recommend that you connect with

an online resource or blog that will update you with the latest resources. Additionally, the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry has developed a comprehensive online site specifically for parents called *Developing Strong Catholic Families* ([www.nfcym.org/family](http://www.nfcym.org/family)) where parents may access resources to “share, celebrate, and live their faith at home and in the world” (USCCB 1997, 12).

## A Comprehensive Way of Life

Church historian R. Scott Appleby of the University of Notre Dame sums it this way: “the challenge of Catholic education and formation in our media-driven, cyberspace age is no less than this: older Catholics must be restored to, and younger Catholics introduced to, a sense of Catholicism as a comprehensive way of life.”

This Catholic way of life may be expressed in and through four areas: Family and Community, Prayer and Worship, Formation, and Justice and Service. Helping to develop and support this Catholic way of life challenges the church to answer a very important question of its own: *what is it doing to help form, support, and nurture parents in these areas of faith so that they are better equipped to pass on the faith to their children?* Indeed, achieving this comprehensive way of life falls on no one parent’s or leader’s shoulders, it requires the active partnership of families with faith community leaders. It takes work, commitment, and faith! As we make our way along this shared journey, may your family experience the depth and the breadth of this comprehensive way of life, as together, we work towards building strong Catholic families that will sustain the next generation of faith-filled disciples.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup>On several measures within the NSYR, there are differences between Hispanic teens and their white counterparts. Generally, Hispanic teens and their parents are more likely to consider their faith “extremely” or “very” important. However, Hispanic Catholic teens are much less likely than white teens to attend Sunday Mass or participate in youth ministry activities despite their parents high commitment. While Hispanic teens report more religious activity than their white peers, such as personal prayer or reading Scripture alone, white teens report “praying together at meal times” more frequently.

See *Pathways of Hope and Faith among Hispanic Teens: Pastoral Reflections and Strategies Inspired by the National Study of Youth and Religion*, Ken Johnson- Mondragón, editor; Saint Mary’s Press, 2008.

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Johnson-Mondragón, Ken, ed. *Pathways to Hope and Faith among Hispanic Teens: Pastoral Reflections and Strategies Inspired by the National Study of Youth and Religion*. Saint Mary’s Press, 2008.

Smith, Christian with Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching the Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

USCCB. *National Directory for Catechesis*. Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2005.

USCCB. *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*. Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1997.

# The Domestic Church of the Home

## Home Is Where Church Begins

References to the home as being the “domestic Church” are not new. The early church began to grow in and through home churches where extended families would gather to celebrate and share their faith with one another. The Second Vatican Council reclaimed the importance of passing on the faith at home by stating “in what might be regarded as the domestic church, the parents are to be the first preachers of the faith for their children by word and example” (Lumen Gentium, #11).

Pope John Paul II further underscored the important role the home plays in the growth of faith by declaring that “the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called “the domestic Church” (Familiaris Consortio, 58). Most recently Pope Benedict XVI referenced the important role between evangelization and the family, stating that “the New Evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church” (Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family. December 1, 2011. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2011/december/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20111201\\_pc-family\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111201_pc-family_en.html))

So what makes the home a domestic church?

There are four truths that families of faith are called upon to illuminate in and through their daily interactions.

1. **Family Life Is Sacred**—Consider how your family might behave if members actually believed they were stepping into church every time they walked in the door of your home. How much more sacred might the time spent together become? How would differences be reconciled? How would daily events be shared and celebrated? How quickly might we seek peace and healing of the brokenness that often is a part of family life?
2. **Family Activity Is Holy**—If family life is sacred, then certainly the activity that flows from and through the family is holy. That does not mean we never fall short of expectations, but this truth does remind us that God is always present to and with us, especially as we relate together through our actions and interactions as family.
3. **Families Are an Evangelizing Community**—Our faith, which is grown and nurtured in the home, is not meant to be confined within the walls of the domestic church any more than it is to be limited to the walls of our parish community. Our faith is to be intentionally shared, through both word and action, with the world. This is known as evangelization and this is a core responsibility of the domestic church.
4. **Families Have a Unique Ministry**—Just as each person is challenged to discover and use the gifts God has given them for service in the world, so too is each family called to discover its unique ministry. Is your family invited to share space with someone who does not have one, to reach out to an unwed mother, become a home to an orphan, or mentor an at-risk teen? Perhaps your family is called to promote vocations or help catechize others in the faith. Part of living as a domestic church is discerning and find out how God is asking you to “be church” to the world.

For specific ideas on what being a domestic church looks like, please review the section found later in this booklet under the heading, “Suggestions for Living Faith as a Family” (see page 12).



# Family Faith Inventory

Take a moment to consider each of the actions and attitudes listed below and circle the number that best describes how you currently experience that area of family faith. When complete, note if you are satisfied with the rating, or if you or your family would like to begin work on developing a family faith plan in the coming year.

## Family and Community

### How well does our family recognize the sacredness of a family meal and discover God in the ordinary moments of family and parish life?

#### 1. Eating dinner together is a priority in our family schedule.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

#### 2. Being Catholic is a significant part of our family identity.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

#### 3. We participate in social and community events at our parish (outside of Mass).

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

#### 4. Religious art, images, and Bibles can be found throughout our home.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

## Prayer and Worship

### Does our family recognize and embody the centrality of prayer in Catholic life, both individually and collectively?

#### 1. We attend Mass together on a regular basis.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

#### 2. I pray on my own (outside of Mass).

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

#### 3. We pray together as a family (outside of Mass).

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

#### 4. Family members take turns leading prayer.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change



5. We celebrate the seasons of the liturgical year (e.g., Advent, Lent) with special prayers, actions, and rituals at home.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

6. Special family occasions are marked with blessings and/or prayers.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

## Formation

### How important is learning and growing in the faith to our individual and family life?

1. I read Scripture on my own.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

2. We read Scripture as a family.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

3. We put a high value on learning more about our Catholic faith.

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

4. I participate in faith formation opportunities (e.g., classes, spiritual reading, and spiritual direction).

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change

5. [Parent Only] I make sure my children/teens participate in faith formation opportunities (e.g., youth ministry, religious education, retreats, mission trips, etc.).

<i>Never</i>	<i>Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Fairly Often</i>	<i>All the Time</i>
1	2	3	4	5

☐ Okay ☐ Change



## Justice and Service

**As individuals and as a family do we seek opportunities to perform works of mercy in our neighborhood, church, or other organizations?**

1. We discuss current events in light of the values and beliefs of the Catholic faith.

Never 1      Very Little 2      Somewhat 3      Fairly Often 4      All the Time 5

☐ Okay      ☐ Change

2. [Parent Only] I model discipleship (following Jesus) for my children and/or teens.

Never 1      Very Little 2      Somewhat 3      Fairly Often 4      All the Time 5

☐ Okay      ☐ Change

3. In our family, we talk about morality and how to judge between right and wrong.

Never 1      Very Little 2      Somewhat 3      Fairly Often 4      All the Time 5

☐ Okay      ☐ Change

4. I am involved in regular justice and service in the parish and/or wider community.

Never 1      Very Little 2      Somewhat 3      Fairly Often 4      All the Time 5

☐ Okay      ☐ Change


5. [Parent Only] We expect family members to be involved in parish ministry or service in addition to Mass and religious education (e.g., lector, usher, catechist, choir, vacation Bible school, etc.).

Never 1      Very Little 2      Somewhat 3      Fairly Often 4      All the Time 5

☐ Okay      ☐ Change

**Family Support is just  
a click away.  
Visit NFCYM's  
Family web resource  
area today!**

**[www.nfcym.org/family](http://www.nfcym.org/family)**



**NFCYM**  
NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR  
CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY

**On This Site**


- Home
- About the NFCYM
- Catholic Youth Ministry
- Family and Parents
- Understanding Youth Culture
- Our Catholic Faith
- Parenting and Family Life
- Multicultural Reality and Gift
- Resources and Research
- Girl Scouts/Camp Fire
- Job Bank
- NCCYM
- NCYC
- Online Store
- Professional Development Programs
- Resources
- Youth Protection

**Related Sites**  
opens new window

- CYFUSA
- Catholic Youth Foundation USA
- Care for Creation, Care for the Poor
- Catholic Youth Address
- Global Climate Change
- NACYM
- National Association of Catholic Youth Ministry Leaders

**Developing Strong Catholic Families**

**Parents Have a Strong Influence on Their Teen**



It might not seem like they are spending a lot of time at home when they are headed off to school, a soccer game, band practice, play rehearsal, a part-time job, a friend's house, a youth ministry event, etc., but teens really do spend more time at home and with their families than anywhere else. When asked about the most important influences in their lives teens consistently list their parents as the people they first look to for help, guidance, advice and approval. When it comes to shaping values and attitudes about faith and life, parents, whether they realize it or not, have a greater impact on their teen than peer groups or the media.

**Parents Need Encouragement**



Parents need encouragement and support to be that positive influence for their adolescent. The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry seeks to support and partner with parents in their important role. This website is one way we hope to help families "share, celebrate, and live their faith at home and in the world." (RTV, p.12)

Below are five general areas of interest or concern for parents of teenagers:

- **Understanding Youth Culture**  
Current trends in teen culture, including "Hot Button" issues that impact teens today and links to movie and music reviews.
- **Our Catholic Faith**  
Information on the Catholic Faith, including everything from church teaching to spiritual resources.
- **Parenting and Family Life**  
Encouragement for parents on how to develop a Catholic culture in their family. Marriage resources and support for single parents and blended families.
- **Multicultural Reality and Gift**  
Information on different cultural perspectives and concerns.
- **Resources and Research**  
Research on attitudes, habits, and needs of adolescents.

*"What you do in your family to create a community of love, to help each other to grow, and to serve those in need is critical, not only for your own sanctification but for the strength of society and our church. It is a participation in the work of the Lord, a sharing in the mission of the church. It is holy."*

U.S. Catholic Bishops. Follow the Way of Love

Please Note: Not all links are Catholic in nature, and some websites (particularly in the "Youth Culture" and "Hot Button Issues" sections) may contain offensive content. We have provided links to web sites that might be helpful for adults who want to learn about some of the darker aspects or the "underside" of youth culture. While not in line with Catholic teaching and morality, adults may find these links helpful in understanding more about what some teens experience in their schools and in their lives. NFCYM in no way endorses the content of these sites.

**Serving Those Who Serve the Young Catholic Church**

CONTACT THE NATIONAL OFFICE

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*One of the most important tasks for the Church today is to promote the faith growth of families by encouraging families to share, celebrate, and live their faith at home and in the world.*

*Renewing the Vision, p.12*

# Developing a Family Faith Plan

After each adult has completed their Family Faith Inventory, use this worksheet to indicate what next steps you wish to take in the coming year, both as an individual and as a family. To assist with this process, review the many suggestions found in the article, “Suggestions for Living Faith as a Family,” which follows this worksheet. Be sure the entire family is present and able to talk through sections C and D before signing the covenant at the page bottom.



- A. Using the four inventory faith themes and your ratings for the statements under each, indicate your general level of satisfaction for each.**

	<i>Not at All</i>		<i>Somewhat</i>		<i>Very</i>
Family and Community	1	2	3	4	5
Prayer and Worship	1	2	3	4	5
Formation	1	2	3	4	5
Justice and Service	1	2	3	4	5

- B. Individually reflect on each of your own inventory ratings and decide on two things you personally will do to grow in faith in the coming year.**

1. Start Date:
2. Start Date:

- C. Share your inventory ratings with other family members and decide together on two things you will do as a family to grow in faith in the coming year.**

1. Start Date:
2. Start Date:

- D. Consider your responses to the above questions and list any support, resources, or help you will need from your parish community to achieve your goals to grow in faith either individually or as a family.**

- 1.
- 2.

## Family Covenant

The \_\_\_\_\_ family commits to taking the steps outlined above in order to grow in our Catholic faith in the coming year. Signed by all family members:

# Suggestions for Living Faith as a Family

*Includes contributions by Greg “Dobie” and Lisa Moser, Cleveland, and Michael Theisen, Rochester, New York*

Learning how to love and rear children and teens as people of faith and followers of Jesus is a challenging and lifelong task. Recognizing that another’s life is always a gift and never a possession, we are challenged to raise our children in God’s image, not our own. As you reflect on how your family may grow stronger in the specific areas highlighted in the Family Faith Inventory, consider some of the following suggestions. Remember, too, that you are not alone. Your parish pastor, director of religious education, and youth ministry leader are able supports and have many resources available for your family’s continued journey in faith.

## **Family and Community**

Recognize the sacredness of a family meal and learn to discover God in the ordinary events of car pools,

love was in your home and how much time you spent together as a family. When contemplating schedule or activity additions or changes, ask, “Will doing this activity or turning on this screen strengthen or weaken our family life?”

**Fill Your Home with Faith Images**—Go shopping at a religious store and invite each person to select an item of faith they would like to see displayed at home. Also, be sure you have family and youth-friendly Bibles at home and in each person’s bedroom (for a list of recommended Bibles, visit the Strong Catholic Family website referenced in this booklet).

## **Model God’s Love and Forgiveness**—

Marital love is reciprocal, parental love is intergenerational; love is passed on and modeled

Recognizing that another’s life is always a gift and never a possession, we are challenged to raise our children in God’s image, not our own.

purchasing groceries, and helping with homework. We are swimming in a sea of God’s grace, so seek ways to celebrate and embrace the gifts of life and the grace found in the present moment of family and parish life, as well as the life of the larger community.

**Make Meal Time Sacred**—Establish days of the week that are set aside as “family meal nights” and ask everyone to commit to working their schedules around these sacred times. Use these meals to pray together and share joys, hopes, disappointments, and sorrows. Help bring to life the connection between your home table with the Lord’s Table by celebrating the Eucharist together weekly.

**Share Your Cross Moments**—“Cross moments” are a simple and meaningful way to focus on significant experiences during family meal nights or other family gatherings. Invite each person to share a time in the recent past (day, week, or month) that his or her life intersected or crossed with God. In other words, where did they see evidence of the presence of God in their life or in the world recently?

**Choose Wisely**—The top two memories of your children and teens will include how much

for successive generations. In our homes, our love for one another should mirror God’s love for all people and all ages, races, and cultures. Be sure that moments of family forgiveness and reconciliation are made visible to the family. Do not “hide” apologies; let the family members who witness family conflict know that the conflict has been worked out. Commit to participating in the sacrament of reconciliation as a family, especially during Lent.

**Connect with Other Parents**—Seek out other adults and parents who share your commitment to Catholic parenting. Learn from their stories, strategies, and life lessons. Ask your parish to begin convening a Strong Catholic Family group (live or online) where parents can come together on a regular basis to share, pray, and support one another along this shared journey.

## **Prayer and Worship**

Family prayer and worship are central to building a strong Catholic family. Keep in mind that the goal of individual, family, or communal prayer and faith sharing is to make the “God connection.” When we share faith with others, we are trying to answer the questions: “Where is God in all of this?” and “What is God saying to me today?”

**Pray on Your Own**—It is very difficult to pray out loud, even with family members, if you do not take time to develop your own prayer life. Take a few minutes during the day or evening to turn off all outside “voices” and to turn on your connection with God. Find a quiet, uninterrupted space to read Scripture, and share with God your concerns, hopes, and fears. Be silent and open to God’s reply. If it is helpful, use a journal to write about your reflection during prayer.

**Pray Together**—Think of all the sacred family moments in which prayer may be integrated: birthdays, anniversaries, crises, trips, church and civic holidays, car accidents, achievements, proms, engagements, confirmation, and other occasions large and small. Use traditional prayers such as the rosary or the Lord’s Prayer, or the printed prayers and other ideas found in this booklet and invite different family members to lead them.

- *Mirror the Liturgical Seasons*—In your home, display the colors and symbols of each liturgical season. Advent wreaths and candles, crèches, ashes, palms, Lenten calendars, Easter egg trees, and the like all connect the life and seasons of the church with daily family life.
- *Ritualize Family Prayer*—On a regular basis make the sign of the cross on each member’s forehead while saying, “May God bless you and be with you.” Do this as a nightly ritual before bedtime and a morning ritual before leaving the home or going on a trip.
- *Be Creative with Family Prayer*—To engage the minds of young and old alike, use objects or images to help family members connect life with faith. Here are just a few ideas for sharing faith using objects and images:

**Pocket Prayers**—Invite everyone to reach into their pocket or purse and place one object on the middle of the table. Then invite each person to think about their relationship with God right now and pick the one object that best describes it. Go around the room (youngest to oldest) and have each person share their reflection.

**Paper Prayers**—Distribute sections of a newspaper (or various papers) to each person in the family and give them time to find a headline or advertisement that best describes his or her life right now. After each person shares his or her reflection, conclude with shared prayer, asking God to be present with each one in his or her journey of life and faith.

**Nature Prayers**—Invite each person to bring in an object from outside that best describes his or her family at the moment. Invite each to share (youngest to oldest) and conclude by joining hands, and praying the Lord’s Prayer, followed by a gesture of peace.

**Picture Prayers**—Using an old photographic album or pictures hanging in the home, invite each person to think of the one image that best reflects his or her faith right now (or that defines family or home or life right now). Invite each to share and conclude with each person offering a prayer intention.

**Cupboard Prayers**—Invite each person to select a food item in the home (cupboard or refrigerator) that best symbolizes the past week for them. Invite each to share (youngest to oldest) and conclude with spontaneous or traditional prayer.

**Pray Before Meals When You Eat Out**—When you eat out as a family, take the time to pause, make the Sign of the Cross, and offer a prayer for the meal you are about to eat. This is a public testimony to your family’s faith and speaks volumes to your family about living your Catholic faith.

**Seize the Seasons**—Use the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent as times to grow deeper in faith and to begin a family faith practice such as Lectio Divina (outlined in the “Formation” section) or praying the rosary. Perform acts of service and sacrifice together as a family and support one another in these efforts so they can be maintained after the season concludes.

**Pray the Music**—Young people find great meaning in their music. Invite your children and teens to play a song that has particular meaning for them, that speaks a message of faith, and to share why. This may also be accomplished with films.

## Formation

Our church documents clearly state that parents are the primary catechists or teachers of faith for their children. Seek ways to pass on a living and active faith to your children and teens and to partner with the parish (and Catholic school if applicable) in supporting a lifelong journey of faith that is modeled throughout all generations within the family.

**Expect to Pass on the Faith**—Evangelization means to share the good news of our faith with others. In order to meet this expectation we must first name and claim the faith for ourselves. No one ever graduates from “faith formation;” it is a lifelong journey. Therefore, be sure that each family member is growing in their own faith. Parents who participate in adult Bible studies, retreats, adult formation programs, or serve as catechists and sponsors cannot help but pass along this updated and re-energized faith to other friends and family members.



**Support Retreats and Youth Ministry Efforts**—Expect that your teens will participate regularly in parish youth ministry and faith formation activities, especially retreats and mission trips, which are known to bear great fruit in the faith growth of young people. Support these and other efforts often with your time, your prayers, and, perhaps, with your gifts of leadership.

**Family Storytelling**—It was no accident that Jesus used stories to communicate great truths and deep wisdom. Great wisdom, values, and meaning can often be brought to life through our family stories. Recall a few significant family events and stories (or watch old videos of these special moments) and ask family members to reflect on what these have taught each of them about God's love, God's forgiveness, and the meaning of suffering and grace.

**Reading and Praying with Scripture at Home**—To prayerfully read and share Scripture together as a family, use a simple three step adaptation of an ancient monastic prayer form called *Lectio Divina* (divine reading), that involves reading a short Scripture reading three times (preferably a section from one of the upcoming Sunday readings). It is suggested that every family member have a Bible (that is age appropriate) of the same Catholic translation, such as the New American Bible (NAB), which is used at Mass, or the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). The three-step movement is as follows: Proclaim the reading and then pause. After a moment of silent reflection, invite each person to share one word that speaks to them (no other sharing at this time).

Proclaim the reading a second time and then pause. After a moment of silent reflection, invite each person to share one phrase that speaks to them (no other sharing at this time). The phrase does not need to include the word from the first step.

Proclaim the reading a third time and then pause. After a moment of silent reflection, invite each person to share what God is saying to them through this reading. You may choose to end with a spontaneous prayer, shared family prayer, individual prayer intentions, or the Hail Mary, Glory Be, or the Lord's Prayer.

## Justice and Service

There are many needs both within the parish as well as the larger community and our faith demands that we feed the hungry, shelter and clothe the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, and care for the marginalized. Seek opportunities to perform these works of mercy both individually and as a family in your neighborhood, church, or other organization. Acting to serve others is truly living faith in action and is an essential element of discipleship.

**Minister Together**—Expect that each person in the family will be involved in some ministry at the parish, with the higher goal of serving together with another family member. Perhaps mother and daughter can serve as lectors, or father and son can serve as catechists and aids, or the whole family can serve as hospitality ministers on a regular basis. Reflect on the gifts each member has and help them discern the best place to use those gifts for the life and mission of the parish community.

**Reach Beyond the Parish to Serve**—Seek ways to participate together as a family in community service, perhaps working

together at a homeless shelter, spending a Saturday morning volunteering with Meals on Wheels, or “adopting” a family in need around each of the holidays.

**Embrace Suffering, Loss, and Death**—Just as Jesus experienced life, death, and resurrection, so too do parents and children. When we deny pain, struggle, disappointment, and loss it deprives our children and teens of essential lessons about love, suffering, and the meanings of life and death. Visit the grave of a family member or attend a funeral together as a family and allow these moments to provoke a conversation about life, death, resurrection, and eternal life, the very basis for our Catholic faith.

**Teach the Difference between Wants and Needs**—Be wary of giving many material things to your children. It can stifle initiative and create expectations that lead to selfishness. Work together as a family to discern whether something is a “want” or a “need” and what difference obtaining it will make both individually and in the life of the family. Before an item is obtained or bought, have family members look through the home for what can be given back or traded in (i.e., donated) to keep material items to a minimum.

**Use a Catholic Lens in Your Family Discussions**—When discussing current events and tough decisions, be mindful to incorporate the perspective of our Catholic faith and values in the discussion. To treat others as we wish to be treated, to forgive generously, to uphold the sanctity of all life from womb to tomb, to note the special care we are called to show for the poor, marginalized, and the oppressed, and to treat all of our brothers and sisters around the world with respect and dignity are important lenses to use and name when we hold family discussions or enter into family problem solving.



# Family Faith Resources

## Websites

There are many online resources and websites to help parents parent and to further understanding of the Catholic faith. Rather than overwhelm you with all these choices, the three websites listed below contain very helpful information and resources for parents, as well as additional links that will point you into many other directions as needed.

**Developing Strong Catholic Families**—<http://www.nfcym.org/family/index.htm>

A wonderful Catholic website to help families “share, celebrate, and live their faith at home and in the world” (USCCB 1997, 12).

**Parent Further**—<http://www.parentfurther.com>

This website focuses on positive, strength-based approaches to parenting, and the small, everyday steps parents can take to help kids be successful in the future.

**Vibrant Faith @ Home**—<http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org>

An interactive resource designed to give families unlimited access to easy-to-use tools, tips, family activities, blogs, forums, and advice to build a stronger, more faith-focused family.

## Print and Media Resources

*52 Simple Ways to Talk with Your Kids about Faith.* Jim Campbell; Loyola Press, 2007.

*Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers.* Revised Edition; USCCB, 2007.

*Catholic Faith and Family Bible.* Harper Catholic Bibles, 2010.

*Catholic Family Connections Bible.* Saint Mary's Press, 2010.

*Catholic Traditions in the Home and Classroom.* Ann Ball; Our Sunday Visitor, 2005.

*Celebrating Faith: Year-Round Activities for Catholic Families.* Mary Cronk Farrell; St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005.

*Christian Parenting Survival Guide from A to Z.* David M. Thomas; Twenty-Third Publications, 2007.

*Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of Today's Adolescent in Your Home, School, and Parish.* Michael Carotta; Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2007.

*Pathways of Hope and Faith Among Hispanic Teens: Pastoral Reflections and Strategies Inspired by the National Study of Youth and Religion.* Ken Johnson-Mondragón, editor; Saint Mary's Press, 2008.

*Raising Happy, Healthy, and Holy Teenagers: A Primer for Parents.* Dr. Robert McCarty; NFCYM, 2009.

*Soul Searching: A Movie about Teenagers and God.* Revelation Studios, 2007. (DVD: 79 minutes)

*Your Catholic Family: Simple Ways to Share the Faith at Home.* Jim Merhaut; St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006.



# Family Faith Prayers

## Family Prayers

### *A Prayer for the Family*

Lord of Life,  
bless and sustain our family.  
Hold us close, keep us connected and protect us  
from all evil.

Gift us with love and patience for one another.  
Help us reconcile that which divides us,  
and celebrate all that unites us as one family,  
where you live and reign now and forever.  
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

*Amen.*

### *A Prayer for Parents*

God of All Creation,  
your breath gave life to all humanity.  
Breathe into us your love and guidance,  
so that we may parent with wisdom and  
compassion.  
Gift us with your strength and courage,  
so we may proclaim your presence through our  
words and actions.  
Enlighten us with words of truth and comfort as  
they are needed,  
and bring us patience and humility as we lead our  
family along this journey.  
Help us pass onto our children a faith that  
matters,  
with you as the center and foundation for our  
family.  
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

*Amen.*

### *A Prayer for Children and Teens*

God of Youth,  
your hope and promise abound in and through  
the young church.  
Bless and hold our children close. Give them eyes  
that see your presence each day, ears that hear  
your words of everlasting life,  
lips that speak your truth, and hands that reach  
out to all in need.  
May each step they take lead them closer to  
knowing you more deeply.  
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

*Amen.*

## Meal Prayers

### *Traditional*

Bless us O Lord, and these your gifts which we are  
about to receive,  
from your bounty through Christ our Lord,  
*Amen.*

### *Alternative*

We thank you Lord for the gift of this food.  
Bless the hands and hearts which brought it to  
our table.  
Keep us mindful of the hungry, the homeless, the  
suffering;  
and especially those who are in our thoughts this  
day...  
Hold close our family and guide us in all ways.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord,

*Amen.*

## Family Blessings

### *General Blessing of Family*

May the Lord bless our family and hold us close,  
May his face shine upon us and bring us peace this  
day and always.  
We ask this together in the name of the Father,  
and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

*Amen.*

### *Family Blessing for a Special Occasion*

Lord of All Life and Joy,  
We give thanks this day for (name of person and/  
or occasion)  
May your presence and grace abound in him/her  
and may s/he know the fullness of your love all  
the days of his/her life.  
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

*Amen.*

