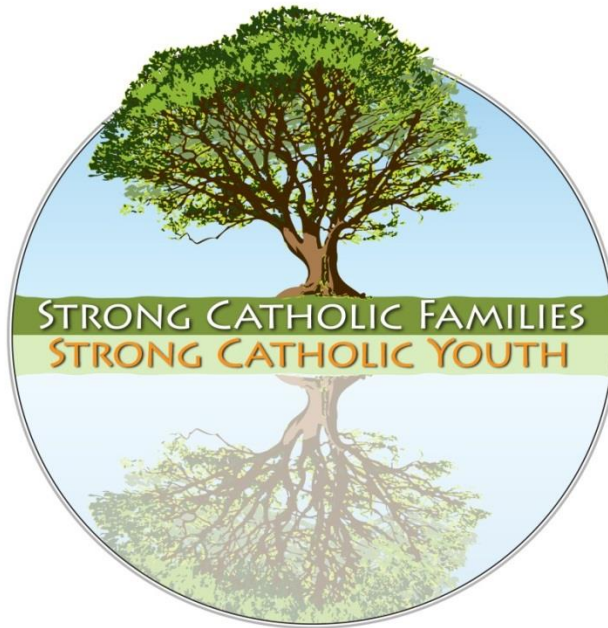


D-2: Parish/School Manual for Leaders and Local SCF Teams

Partnering with Parents to Bring Home the Faith



Introduction

Supporting parents in their role as heads of their domestic churches and primary facilitators of faith for their families has the potential to transform ministry within parishes and schools. The Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth (SCF) process also will help you engage the faith community in an ongoing reflection on, and assessment of, how best to serve the families, parents, and young people of your community. As their needs are met, other needs certainly will surface. In this light, we offer this manual which outlines how the SCF process is implemented within a parish or school setting by the local leadership and the SCF Team.

This manual will be reviewed with you by your diocesan or regional consultant.

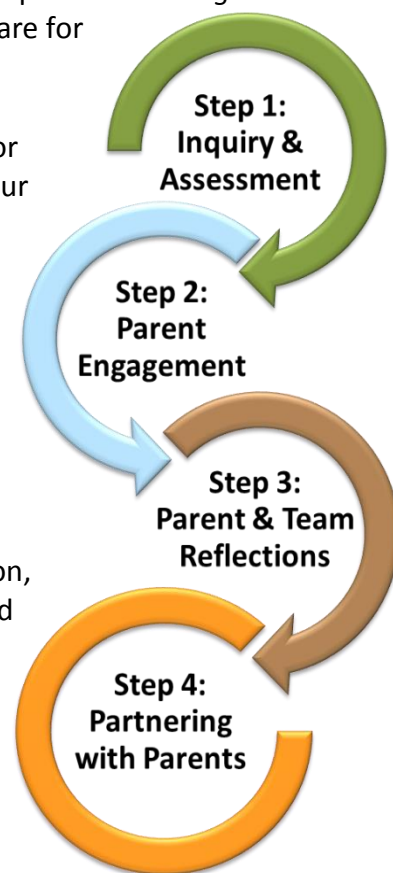
Table of Contents

Overview of the Strong Catholic Families Process	1-2
A Step-by-Step Guide to the Strong Catholic Families Process	3-10
Appendix D2-1: SCF Team Reflection Process	11
Appendix D2-2: Family Impact Questions	12
Appendix D2-3: Initial Inquiry and Assessment Reflection for Leaders	13-14
Appendix D2-4: SCF Information Flyer	15
Appendix D2-5: Parent Response Form	16-17
Appendix D2-6: Parent Follow-Up Session	18-21

Overview of the *Strong Catholic Families* Process

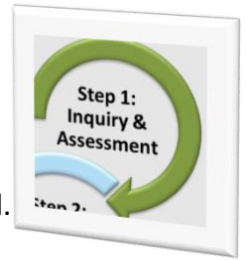
The *Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth* process is made up of four distinct steps that lead to numerous avenues of faith growth within families and the entire faith community.

- **Step 1. Inquiry and Assessment:** The process begins with a meeting of the parish/school leadership and a local consultant, who presents an overview of the *Strong Catholic Families* dynamic and assists the leadership in assessing their readiness to begin, as well as the impact this direction will have upon current programming and structures. Once the leadership is prepared to make this initial commitment, it develops a local *Strong Catholic Families* Team, composed of leaders, parents, and staff to prepare for the next steps outlined below.
- **Step 2. Parent Engagement:** A trained presenter provides one or more high-impact Foundational Parent Presentations, a two-hour session featuring contemporary research combined with engaging visuals, pertinent stories and small and large group dialogues designed to help parents understand their critical role in forming faith and the impact they can have upon their children.
Your *SCF* Team plans follow-up gatherings to engage parents further in conversations about their needs and concerns, and practical strategies for growing in faith as a family.
- **Step 3. Parent & Team Reflections:** Involves additional reflection, discernment and action steps by all involved. Parents are invited to utilize their Family Faith Inventories to create a Family Faith Plan for their home while the *SCF* Team, composed of staff and other parents and leaders, use the input and feedback from Step 2 to develop next steps that will result in closer partnerships with parents in reaching the goal of empowering and supporting families to grow in faith.
- **Step 4. Partnering with Parents:** This is an ongoing and evolving movement of developing and implementing new strategies, further reflection and assessment, and continued commitment to supporting the partnership between the institutional church (parishes and schools) and the domestic church. This cyclic process continues as more and more families become empowered to grow in their Catholic faith.



A Step-by-Step Guide to the Strong Catholic Families Process

Step 1: Inquiry and Assessment and Development of the Local SCF Team



Goals:

1. Discern the “fit” of the Strong Catholic Families process for your parish or school.
2. Build a team.

A. Initial Consultation

1. *Contact:* Contact diocesan or national coordinator to set up an initial meeting (min. 90 min.) with key leaders, parish staff and/or school administration and a SCF consultant.
2. *Prepare:* Leaders prepare for the meeting by reviewing the Strong Catholic Families Guide for Leaders (B2), the promotional video (www.strongcatholicfamilies.org) and by completing the Inquiry and Assessment Reflection (Appendix D2-3) and bringing the completed assessment to the discernment meeting.
3. *Meet and Discern:* At the discernment meeting, the SCF consultant and leaders discern the “fit” of the SCF process with the parish or school.

Explanation

Once a parish/school determines its interest in exploring the *Strong Catholic Families* process, it contacts the diocesan coordinator to schedule consultation(s) that include(s) key leaders of the parish/school. The goal of the consultations and assessment is for leaders to come to understand the *Strong Catholic Families* process, to have any questions or concerns addressed, and to determine the leadership’s readiness to move forward.

Prior to any onsite consultation(s), staff/key leaders are asked to spend time individually with the Inquiry and Assessment Reflection (Appendix D2-3). This is used by the consultant to help leaders assess their receptivity and readiness for becoming a *Strong Catholic Families* community. The consultation(s) consist(s) of conversations with key leaders and may include the full or abbreviated versions of the SCF Leadership PowerPoint Presentation, which highlights both the key aspects of the research presented in the SCF Foundational Parent Presentation, as well as a critical call to build a parent-equipping, family-centered parish or school.

B. Development of the Localized Strong Catholic Families Team (SCF Team)

1. *Recruit a Leader:* The SCF team leader is normally a staff-level person with the gifts, time, and access to resources to organize and empower the local team to follow through with the SCF process.
2. *Recruit a Team:* Ideally team members will make a commitment of at least one year, (preferably two years when getting started) and will bring to the team the commitment to follow through with the SCF process and the ability to attentively listen to the needs and hopes of parents and families.
3. *Meet and Plan:* The SCF leader convenes the team to plan for the SCF Foundational Parent Presentation(s) and initial follow-up gathering(s).

Explanation

Should the leadership agree to make the commitment to become a *Strong Catholic Families* parish or school, the next step is to recruit a *Strong Catholic Families* Team to lead the initiative. The SCF Team is composed of six to ten people, comprised of staff, parents, and other parish/school leaders whose gifts will help contribute to the overall success of the initiative. This team then begins preparing for the SCF Foundational Parent Presentation(s) and the subsequent extended Parent Follow-Up Session (Appendix D2-6) outlined in Step 2.

The specific gifts and attitudes required of potential team members include:

- Ability to attentively listen to needs and hopes of parents.
- Possess a non-judgmental attitude (i.e.: avoid “we”/”they” language in terms of parents and leaders or speaking down to or guiltning parents for “not doing their job”).
- Team players who work well with others and are not bound to ministry “turfs”.
- Aware of and sensitive to parents/grandparents/guardians and the stressors and issues they face.
- Reflect the diversity of the faith community which they represent.
- Creative thinkers who are technologically aware and open to new ideas.

Step 2: Parent Engagement

Goals:

1. EVOKE urgency in parents for taking responsibility for the faith development of their children, and leading their domestic churches.
2. EVOKE urgency in grandparents and others for actively transmitting the faith to the next generation by supporting parents and family faith.
3. ENVISION parents and families actively engaged in their faith, and beginning to EQUIP them for their indispensable role as leaders of their domestic churches.
4. EVANGELIZE through prayer and faith sharing throughout.



C. Hosting the Foundational Parent Presentation(s)

1. *Schedule Parent Presentation(s):* The SCF team schedules a sufficient number of Parent Presentations to impact a critical mass of parents/grandparents, capitalizing on already-scheduled gatherings such as mandatory sacramental preparation meetings, athletics meetings, PTO gatherings, etc. (Important: hosting multiple presentations is recommended over a single session).
2. *Publicize:* Get out the word using every available communication method, including and especially personal invitations and the SCF promo video. Be sure to note that grandparents, relatives, and single people all are welcome!
3. *Plan Logistics and Hospitality:* Prepare for handouts (see list on next page), nametags, beverages, snacks, comfortable seating, and creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Round tables are preferred.
4. *Prepare Flyer for Follow-Up:* Develop and distribute a save-the-date flyer announcing the Parent Follow-Up gathering and distribute this at the end of the Foundational Presentation Session(s).
5. *Plan for Immediate Review of Parent Response Forms:* Since the forms provide a way for parents to ask for help, it's vital to review them and respond to urgent needs with appropriate pastoral care or referrals within the week following the presentation.

Explanation

The initial movement in engaging parents occurs through two different gatherings of parents: the two-hour Foundational Parent Presentation(s), which are conducted in your local community by a trained presenter, and the Parent Follow-Up Session, scheduled within two to four weeks of the last SCF Foundational Parent Presentation(s), and conducted by your SCF Team. Sessions should be open to all parents/grandparents as well as other interested adults.

The SCF Foundational Parent Presentation(s) focus on the current situation families face in rearing Catholic children and teens today and provide an important time for the leadership and your SCF team to listen to parents' needs, concerns, and hopes for the role that faith will play in their lives. In order to engage a wide array of parents, including those who typically would not choose to attend such a presentation, many parishes choose to require all parents whose children are enrolled in any sacramental program (baptism through confirmation). Presentations may be offered as often as necessary to reach all parents, and ideally would be offered annually as a way of engaging new parents and community members. In this way, the leadership is assured of reaching as many parents as possible—the more who get the message, the more impact it will have.

Schools may choose to use the SCF Foundational Parent Presentation(s) as part of school year kickoff gatherings with parents, parent-teacher organization gatherings, and/or other special parent gatherings. In school settings, as in parish settings, including a presentation in a mandatory parent gathering can have a far reaching impact.

Room Set-Up for Foundational Parent Presentation(s): the Foundational Parent Presentation(s) require an LCD projector, large screen or blank wall area, an extension cord with multiplug, plus a lectern and microphone (if warranted by the space and number of participants). The screen or wall area should be large enough (minimum of seven feet) and high enough so that all attending will have a good view. The presenter will supply the laptop computer and PowerPoint presentation. If the presenter chooses to use one of the optional videos, a speaker system/connection will be needed as well.

Handouts Required:

- One copy per family of the *Family Faith Resource Booklet* (A2) and *Table Tent Prayer Card* (A3).
- One copy per person of the *Parent Response Form* (A1) and a pen/pencil.
- One copy per family of the Save the Date flyer promoting the next Parent Follow-Up Gathering (to be developed by the local SCF Team).

In addition to organizing refreshments and making copies of handouts, the SCF Team should consider the importance of having parish/school leadership in attendance:

- **Parish:** Pastor, priests, deacons, staff members, catechists and ministry team members in parish faith formation, pastoral council members, finance council members, and other committees and organizations (e.g., Knights of Columbus, athletics, scouting, etc.) who are engaged in serving the youth and families of your parish community.
- **School:** Pastor (in parish schools), principal, administrative staff, faculty members, campus ministers, guidance counselors, etc.

Toward the end of each Foundational Parent Presentations, the presenter will invite parents to complete a Parent Response Form (Appendix D2-5), which serves as an important source of information to the leadership and the SCF Team with regard to what parents need to help their families grow in faith as the domestic church of the home.

Also at this time, a member of the local SCF Team will announce the date and time of the Parent Follow-Up Session (or multiple sessions) which serves as an extended listening/planning session to allow parents more opportunity to talk, pray, and share with one another about their experiences, frustrations, and success stories in parenting and passing on the faith. At this session, the local SCF Team will also report back to the parents what it has heard from them (via the Parent Response Forms and subsequent conversations) and what initial supportive responses/resources the SCF Team is contemplating. It's a good idea to distribute save the date flyers and to circulate a sign-up sheet to solicit a commitment to the follow-up session at this time.

Following the Foundational Parent Session the SCF Team meets to review the Parent Response Forms and begin to plan for the Follow-Up session using the SCF Team Reflection Process outline found in Appendix D2-1. During this time the SCF Team should take note if any Parent Response Form indicates a need for more immediate attention or pastoral intervention.

Important: If a SCF Team meeting is not planned within the first week, it is important that members of the pastoral staff do a quick review of the Response Forms and respond appropriately for any requiring immediate follow-up.

D. Plan and Host the Follow-up Parent Listening Session(s)

1. *Reflect and Plan:* Use the SCF Team Reflection session (Appendix D2-1) to review and discuss what the SCF team heard during the Foundational Parent Presentation and from reviewing the Parent Response Forms. A summary of these needs and directions should be prepared for presentation at the parent follow-up session.
2. *Publicize and Remind:* The SCF Team uses all available communication channels to get out the word. Parents, grandparents and others who missed the Parent Presentation are welcome as well.
3. *Prepare Well:* Use Appendix D2-6 to prepare logistics, hospitality, video/media and small group leaders to help process and guide discussions.
4. *Gather, Facilitate and Listen:* The Follow-Up session(s) are “safe zones” for parents looking for support, good ideas, and encouragement in how they can grow their own families in faith so lots of small group discussion and practical feedback is critical.
5. *Record and Publish Ideas:* Be sure to record and make available afterwards the wisdom, good and helpful ideas and practices – especially those that will help move your faith community to the next steps that your parish or school should take.

Explanation

Following the Foundational Parent Session the SCF Team meets to review the Parent Response Forms and begin to plan for the follow-up session using the SCF Team Reflection Process outline found in Appendix D2-1. These Parent Follow-Up sessions (found in Appendix D2-6) typically are led by your SCF Team. The primary goal is to actively listen to parents and, using the results of their completed Family Faith Inventories (found in the

Family Faith Resource Booklet) assist parents in discerning what initial steps they want to take in order to grow in faith as a family. These sessions may yield many ideas, suggestions, and needs, so it is important that the *SCF* Team actively listen and reflect back what they are hearing without trying to problem-solve, counsel, or advise. During this gathering, the *SCF* Team will share an initial summary of the responses to the Parent Response Forms as a way of building on the energy and positive forward direction that has been generated through the process thus far. The *SCF* Team should also let the parents know that the team will be convening after the Follow-Up Session in order to plan next steps based on what they learn and hear from parents at this session(s).

These sessions are golden opportunities for evangelization, as parents are invited to tell their stories and share their wisdom and worries. Ideally *SCF* Team members will plan for engaging prayer and faith sharing that help to affirm and uphold the profound respect for the indispensable role that parents are playing in the faith lives of their children.

SCF Teams are certainly free to adapt the follow-up sessions as they see fit, combine them with other scheduled events (i.e.: between masses, during weekly religious education sessions, etc...) so as to accommodate busy schedules, and add elements of their own that may have special relevance for their parish or school. For instance, the *SCF* Team may use this as an opportunity to invite parents into a deeper engagement in the life of the parish faith community, or to help school parents get involved in the religious formation that's happening in their children's classrooms. Moreover, the Family Faith Inventory and Family Faith Plan found in the Resource Booklet can easily lead to specific commitments at home and within the local and larger communities.

Step 3: Parent and *SCF* Team Reflections, Planning and Follow-Through

Goals:

1. ENVISION next steps in our families, parishes and schools.
2. EQUIP ourselves, our parents, families, parishes and schools.
3. EVOLVE into parent-equipping, family-centered parishes and schools, at the service of our domestic churches of the home.
4. EVOKE and EVANGELIZE as you go to sustain Spirit and momentum.



E. Parent and Team Reflections, Planning and Follow-Through

1. *Complete Family Faith Inventory and Faith Plan:* At home prior to the Follow-Up Session(s), parents use their Resource Booklets to assess and develop a family faith plan.
2. *Provide Resources:* The *SCF* Team provides access to helpful print, online and pastoral resources to parents, grandparents and families that will support parents in living out their Family Faith Plans.
3. *Follow Through with Ideas and Directions:* The *SCF* Team meets after the Foundational Parent Sessions(s) and again after the Parent Follow-Up session(s) to strategize how to best follow-through and support the ideas and directions that were developed during these conversations. These first few next steps are critical in communicating to parents and families that the leadership has listened and responded to needs and next steps.
4. *Develop Parent Networking Options:* The *SCF* Team assists parents in developing the faith networks they require that will provide mutual support, prayer and faith-sharing, and idea-sharing that will assist all in growing in faith as a domestic church.

Explanation

All parents are encouraged to complete the Family Faith Inventory and Family Faith Plan found on pages 8-11 in the *Family Faith Resource Booklet*. These should be completed at home prior to the Parent Follow-Up Session(s). This assessment allows parents to determine their family's starting point for how they want to nurture faith within their family. Encouragement and follow-up from leadership and ongoing reference to each family's faith plan will help families follow through on their covenants to grow stronger in their Catholic faith.

Before and after the Parent Follow-Up Session(s), the SCF Team meets to pray about, reflect on and discern the feedback, ideas and needs that have been lifted up thus far in each part of the process so that new and responsive delivery systems, strategies and helpful programs and resources can be developed and introduced to begin responding to the emerging needs. As part of this response process, the SCF Team, along with leaders of the parish or school, should follow through with an ongoing stream of helpful and practical and pastoral resources of various kinds, especially via digital communications and social media for the young parents with small children at home.

Special Note: Numerous session resources for both parents and families can be found online at www.strongcatholicfamilies.org under the Session Resources for Parents and Families link. This website page also include several short video discussion clips and questions that help focus parent groups on how to best nurture faith in the home.

No matter the strategic and programmatic plans that evolve at this point, the SCF Team should plan on joining forces with parish or school leaders to facilitate the development of networks of parent and family faith groupings, both formal and informal. Formal settings might include adult faith formation opportunities, gatherings of young parents expecting their first child, or small faith-sharing groups. Since parents regularly interact with one another in a wide variety of informal settings, leaders can also encourage and equip them to talk family faith with one another in informal social settings, at their children's athletics activities, and via social media.

It is important to remember that the basic faith trajectory of children is established during the first decade or so of life, at home by parents, so it's absolutely critical to make these kinds of support systems and resources readily and easily available – and in an ongoing way over an extended period of time.

Step 4: Partnering with Parents

Goals:

1. EVOLVE by continuing to EVOKE, ENVISION, EQUIP and especially EVANGELIZE!
2. EVALUATE as you proceed, fine-tuning, adjusting, customizing, growing, learning, applying, and the of course, evolving more.



F. Ongoing Efforts and Evolution

1. *Evolve the SCF Team:* Over time, your SCF Team will need to recruit fresh leadership and new members who will need to be oriented to the SCF process, the recent history of the team's ongoing efforts, and plans that are in the works.
2. *Celebrate Often:* Highlight the achievements and progress, small or large, to help insure that energy and momentum are sustained over time.
3. *Communicate Often:* Even if there are no gatherings or events on the calendar – in fact, especially if there are none on the calendar – the SCF Team continues to use every available communication channel to funnel resources, consciousness-raising, helpful tips, funny stories, family updates, births, deaths, transitions, etc., to parents, families and the broader parish or school community.
4. *Avoid the Usual Traps and Pitfalls:* Change experts tell us to look out for the following: prematurely declaring victory, failing to integrate changes into a “new normal,” expecting quick fixes and stunning short-term results, and getting distracted from the ultimate goals/vision. Remember, *this is a long-term process of change!*
5. *Keep Families at the Center:* Through all planning and program efforts undertaken by the community, continue to hold up the critical and central questions to direct all efforts: *Where are the parents/families in this (process, program, event)? How will this empower them to take more ownership of the faith formation/transmission process?*
6. *Evangelize Throughout:* Through all that your team does, be sure that prayer, faith-sharing, Sacraments, devotions, listening, and the love of the living Christ is at the heart and soul of it all.

Explanation

As your SCF Team partners with parents to reflect, assess, develop, and implement new strategies, your parish/school will become more and more family-centered over time, and children reared in your families will grow more firmly grounded in their faith.

It's normal for any team or ministry group to change over time, and so part of the job of your SCF Team is to keep a sharp eye out for new members and fresh leadership. After a year or so, it's healthy for everyone to review the commitment, and either “re-up” for another year, or move on.

Departing team members ought to be thanked and celebrated, and incoming members will need to be oriented to the mission, goals, and especially the “why” behind the SCF process. Use the SCF Leader Resource (Resource B2), the SCF Leader Presentation, and especially the stories of outgoing team members to assist new members in getting into the flow of the team.

SCF Team members ought to be especially attuned to the typical traps and pitfalls that plague long-term change efforts like this one. One or another may be tempted to declare an early and complete “victory” on the heels of a terrific session with parents, for instance, asking “how could we ever top that!?” But one successful program or presentation (or two or three for that matter) will not result in achieving the desired goal of revitalizing the domestic churches of the home, with engaged and well-equipped parents leading the way. This is why Strong Catholic Families has been developed as a long-term process that requires stamina and commitment. Avoid the temptation and watch for the programming attitude that says “well we did that, now what's next?” which will ultimately only result in

furthering the disabling notion that the institutional church is the center of all faith formation efforts and will push families back to the outer periphery of the faith transmission process.

It's also a real problem if the SCF process becomes just one more ministry of the parish, or one more committee at school. Ideally, every ministry of the parish will "get" what we're trying to accomplish, and get on board. Moreover, in a school it's not just the religion teachers or faculty who ought to be engaged in this effort, but the entire school community.

Remember that this isn't a sprint, but a marathon, so it will be important to sustain the energy and vitality of the team, especially when there are "flops" and things just don't work out the way we'd hoped. It's especially important to celebrate the small steps and little victories, lest people get discouraged.

Literally the only way to sustain a process like this is to keep our eyes fixed on the living Christ, in prayer, faith-sharing, the Sacraments, and in growing in love and the life of the Holy Spirit. Every gathering, every meeting, every planning session, and every communication is an opportunity to connect, share faith and evangelize.

The SCF process is designed to help leaders dream and prepare for the next steps in responding to parents' needs and to further the mutual partnership with parents. We anticipate that in *Strong Catholic Families* parishes and schools, the steps of listening and responding will be repeated frequently in an ongoing rhythm of prayer, discussion and planning as more parent sessions are held, fresh needs emerge, and pioneering approaches give rise to new paths of partnership and support. ***Please contact your diocesan or regional consultant if you have any questions about using this process or need outside assistance in facilitating your SCF Team.***

G. Share Your Effective Practices

One of the ways that the *Strong Catholic Families* national initiative continues to grow and develop is through the sharing of effective practices among parishes, schools, and dioceses that make up the National SCF Network. As you develop effective approaches, strategies, and structures that support and enhance the development of faith growth within families, we ask that you share them with the network by e-mailing the SCF National Coordinator Michael Theisen (miket@nfcym.org) using the following format:

- **Title:** Approach, strategy, or structure you have created
- **Audience:** Diocesan, parish, school leaders, presenters, parents, etc.
- **Contact:** Name, location, e-mail, and daytime phone that others can contact you.
- **Description:** Include a sentence or two describing the practice and attach any Word documents, PDFs, website links, or video/audio files that may be posted and shared with others.

To see the dozens of effective practices already online, visit the Effective Practices website at: http://www.nfcym.org/programs/training/strongfamilies_practices.htm



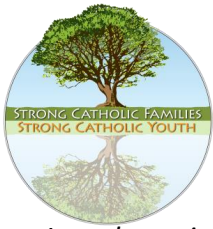
Appendix D2-1: SCF Team Reflection Process

Outcomes: The local SCF Team coordinator or designated staff person facilitates this process with the SCF Team. It occurs after the Foundational Parent Presentation(s), and is designed to engage the SCF Team and parish/school leadership in:

- Discussing the team's thoughts, feelings, reactions, and responses to the presentation(s).
- Identifying emerging priorities based on the information presented.
- Plan for the Parent Follow-Up Session(s)

Parent Response Forms and Family Impact Questions: Prior to this meeting, be sure that all team members have had time to review the Parent Response Forms and have reflected individually on the Family Impact Questions found in Appendix D2-2.

- Opening Prayer:** Consider using the Prayer for Families found on the *Resource Booklet*.
- Round Robin Discussion:** Each person has several minutes to provide initial responses to the information, guided by the following (Note: you may wish to make notes of responses on three different sheets of newsprint):
 1. What surprised you from the parent session and your review of the response forms?
 2. What are parents in our community needing most?
 3. What struck you as most significant for our parish/school to focus on at this time?
- Common Threads and Emerging Themes:** The SCF team members take a few moments of quiet prayer to reflect on what they have heard, focusing on emerging and common themes. Following the reflection, and by way of discerning possible emerging priorities, begin to brainstorm responses to these sentence stems, one at a time, which should be posted on newsprint (Note: rules of brainstorming apply, with no criticism of ideas and minimal discussion, in order to generate a list that will be prioritized in a subsequent step):
 1. *If we fully placed parents at the center of our faith formation efforts, it would require us to...*
 2. *In order to help parents better form their families in faith, we are being asked to...*
 3. *All of this says to me that our next steps should include...*
- Planning for the Parent Follow-Up Session:** Review the outline for the parent follow-up session found in Appendix D2-6 and be sure that all SCF Team members are involved in the various roles required such as:
 - Session Facilitator
 - Hospitality (check-in table, set up and snacks)
 - Prayer
 - Small Group Leaders
 - Session Recorders
 - Parent Response Form Report/Summary
- Set up a follow-up meeting to occur after the parent follow-up gatherings and conclude with prayer



Appendix D2-2: Family Impact Questions

In order to incorporate a family perspective in ministry, consider the following regarding the various policies, programs, ministries, ceremonies or services offered by your parish/school:

A CHRISTIAN VISION OF FAMILY LIFE

- Does it acknowledge the family as the domestic church by showing an appreciation of family life as sacred and family activity as holy?
- In what ways does it promote and strengthen family relationships rather than tax the family system?
- Does it encourage families to reach out to other families?
- Does it promote, support, and encourage families to share and grow in faith within the home?

THE FAMILY AS A DEVELOPING SYSTEM

- Does it respond to the various life cycle issues of the participating families? Does it address the special needs of families in transition or crisis?
- Does it assist the individual/family to understand and deal with the influence of their family of origin when appropriate?
- Does it help individuals/families deal with changes that the program may encourage?
- Does it offer skills and build confidence in families so that they might hand on faith traditions and values to their children?

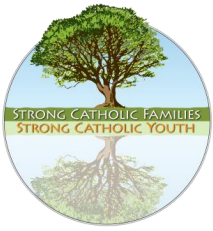
FAMILY DIVERSITY

- Is there a preferred family structure implicit in the program or policy? Does it reward or penalize certain kinds of families?
- Can families of ethnic, racial, or cultural minorities express their differences and richness within the policy/program/ceremony?
- Does it address families with special needs ensuring that respect and consideration are given?

PARTNERSHIP OF FAMILY AND PARISH

- Does publicity and written material about the program or policy reflect that families are partners or does it minimize parent involvement and responsibility?
- Do leaders involve families in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the program?
- Does it strengthen the family's ability to deal with institutions such as schools, hospitals, government, social service agencies, etc.?
- Does it concretely broaden the choices and options of participating families to lessen stress and not add to it?
- Does the program meet the family's expressed needs and start where they are?

Adapted from Families at the Center (USCCB) by the Family Life Apostolate, Archdiocese of New Orleans



Appendix D2-3: Initial Inquiry and Assessment Reflection

Please review the Strong Catholic Family Information Flyer (Appendix 4) and complete the following questions individually prior to the meeting with your diocesan consultant.

1. I am interested in *Strong Catholic Families* for our parish/school because...
2. I believe some of the strengths of our parents and families are...
 - a. A success story that illustrates this is...
3. I believe some of the weaknesses of our parents and families are...
 - a. A story that illustrates this is...
.....
4. What has been your greatest success in your parish/school in engaging parents? What made it successful?
5. Imagine you are a typical parent in your parish/school. What would help you deepen your faith?
 - a. What is holding you back?
 - b. What support are you (as a parent) currently getting for helping to grow your family's faith at home? What would you like more of?
6. How and when does parish/school evaluate how well it serves families and young people?
 - a. What have you learned from the evaluations and how have they informed your current efforts?
 - b. If you need more assessment, how and when will you do it?
 - c. How will your parish/school respond if they receive feedback that a program or approach with parents is not working?
7. How well is our parish/school prepared to respond to parents who need help? What do we need in order to become better prepared?

8. On a ten point scale with 1 “not well” and 10 “very well,” how does our leadership respond to angry or disgruntled parents?

The *Strong Catholic Families* process will be only as effective as the level of collaboration and shared vision that supports it within your community. Who absolutely needs to be on board to ensure the success of this collaborative vision and direction? Consider the list below and fill in specific names that come to mind, whether staff or volunteers:

- ☐ Catechetical Ministry: _____
- ☐ Clergy/Deacons: _____
- ☐ Children Liturgy of the Word: _____
- ☐ Sacramental Ministry Leaders: (Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, Marriage): _____
- ☐ Family Life Ministry: _____
- ☐ Athletics Ministry: _____
- ☐ Catholic School: _____
- ☐ PTO President: _____
- ☐ Youth Ministry: _____
- ☐ Pastoral Ministry: _____
- ☐ Pastoral Council: _____
- ☐ Finance Council: _____
- ☐ Home School Association: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

9. Which three families best serve as models for “living faith between the Sundays” that you would hope other families would emulate? Why?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

10. Are there any potential roadblocks, previous experiences, or leadership issues (i.e., “elephants in the room”) that might undermine the success of this initiative if the community were to move forward at this time? Explain...

11. How might the *SCF* initiative impact your parish/school mission and current priorities? Or be impacted by them?

12. What type of diocesan support do you need as you approach the challenges and opportunities provided through the *Strong Catholic Families* initiative?

Appendix D2-4: Strong Catholic Family Information Flyer

Building Strong Catholic Families... It Takes a Partnership!

Partnering with Parents to Bring Home the Faith



All across the country, pastors—along with parish and school leaders—are asking for effective ways to engage parents in the life and mission of the church, as well as seeking ways to help them take ownership as the primary leaders of faith within their families. To work together toward this desirable goal, we invite you to

consider a dynamic grassroots process, designed to reach out to parents in a way that empowers and challenges them to form *Strong Catholic Families*.

What is Strong Catholic Families About?

Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth is an ongoing parish- or school-based process that engages and strengthens parents and families in growing as a domestic church through a close and vital partnership with the parish and school community.

How Does it Work?

The *Strong Catholic Families* process is made up of four distinct steps that lead to numerous avenues of faith growth within families and the entire faith community.

The process begins with consultations between a diocesan consultant and parish/school leadership. During these meetings, the consultant presents an overview of the *Strong Catholic Families* dynamic and assists the leaders in assessing their readiness to begin building strong Catholic families and in thinking through the implications this direction will have upon current programming and structures. Once the leadership is prepared to make this initial commitment, it begins to assemble a local team of parents and staff to prepare for the next steps.

Step 2 seeks to engage parents through presentations and dialogues with a diocesan-trained presenter who uses contemporary research combined with engaging visuals and pertinent stories to help parents understand the critical role they possess in how faith is lived in their home and especially in their children's lives. Follow-up gatherings will help engage parents in exploring their

emerging needs and concerns while exploring practical strategies for how to best grow in faith as a family.

Step 3 involves additional critical reflection and discernment by all involved: staff, leaders, parents, and the local *Strong Catholic Families* Team, concerning the next steps in partnering with one another to empower and support family faith growth.

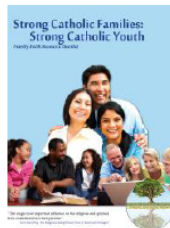
Step 4 is an ongoing and evolving movement comprised of implementing new strategies, further reflection and evaluation, and continued commitment to supporting the growing partnerships between the institutional church/school and the domestic church. This cycle continues throughout the years ahead as more and more families become empowered to grow in their Catholic faith.

What Happens as a Result?

In a nutshell, evangelization! But the specific look is as diverse as the hundreds of parishes and schools and the dozens of dioceses who make up the growing *Strong Catholic Families* network because each local community decides its best direction given the unique resources, culture, and history of the community. Some of these local responses have included the following:

- *Adjusting program structures to accommodate family faith gatherings between Masses.*
- *Parent groups that meet during sacramental sessions.*
- *Sessions on how to lead prayer and share faith in the home, developing family mission statements, and more.*
- *Coaching parents to pass on the Catholic faith to kids.*
- *Intergenerational Vacation Bible School programs.*
- *Online webinars for parents on Catholic faith topics.*

What Is the Cost?



There is very minimal cost for this initiative because *your diocese has already purchased the copyright permissions for you to use every year!* A community may choose to purchase color copies of the *Family Faith Resource Booklet* and table tent prayer cards, which each family receives during the initial parent session, but permission is granted for these resources to be copied locally as needed.

Who is Behind This Initiative?

The *Strong Catholic Families* initiative is presented in partnership by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers (NACFLM), and the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). It is also available in Spanish!



Contact Your Diocese to Begin Building *Strong Catholic Families* Today!



Appendix D2-5: Parent Response Form

Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth

Partnering with Parents to Bring Home the Faith

*Completing this form does not obligate you to anything
nor add you to any mailing list*

Full Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP Code _____

Parish _____ E-Mail _____

Day Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Check those that apply:

- ☐ I am interested in meeting with other parents for sharing ideas and support. Please contact me as groups begin to form.
- ☐ I am interested in helping our parish plan some follow-up steps to creating Strong Catholic Families and Youth.
- ☐ I am interested in receiving resources (print/electronic/e-mail) to help me parent my children in the faith.
- ☐ I am interested in becoming more involved in our church: ☐ for myself ☐ with my family
- ☐ Additional comments or ideas you wish to communicate to the leadership of the parish:

Please rate today's Parent Presentation:

	Poor	OK	Good	Very Good
Presenter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Content of Presentation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

One thing I learned (or was reminded of) in this presentation _____

One thing I (or my family) might do differently because of what I heard today: _____

"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts."

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Vatican, Dec. 7, 1965

Take a few moments to help us to better support and partner with you...

Our Catholic Church and faith are here to support you with your children, your family, and in our parish community. ***This means that whatever you are dealing with matters to the church.*** We are here to celebrate what is working and to walk with you as you face life's expected and unexpected challenges.

Please let us know how we can be more supportive of you and your family by checking the area(s) below. If you check any of the following, we will respond to you directly and confidentially. May God bless you and your family and know that our love, prayers, and support are with you!

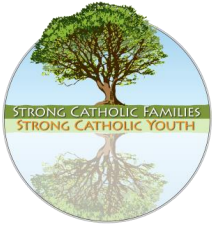
- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building family traditions | <input type="checkbox"/> Support for my marriage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family prayer resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Family counseling resources |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doing service for others with my children | <input type="checkbox"/> Need a parent support group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ways to volunteer in our community | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress and time management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking about faith and morals at home | <input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol, drugs, and addiction issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding the other generation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dating and adolescent sexuality | <input type="checkbox"/> Health needs for family or extended family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Websites, books, & family resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Support for single parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making moral decisions in our family | <input type="checkbox"/> Support for blended families |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with loss and grief | <input type="checkbox"/> Support for incarcerated family members |

Other requests or needs: _____

What is the best way to reach you during the day?

- ☐ Phone _____
☐ E-Mail _____
☐ Other: _____





Appendix D2-6: Parent Follow-Up Session

This session is facilitated by the local SCF Team and should be offered within 2-4 weeks of the Foundational Parent Presentation. The date/time should be announced at the Foundational Parent Presentation(s) and the session should be planned by the SCF Team following the initial parent session(s).

- A. For:** Those who attended the SCF Foundational Parent Presentation(s), spouses, and other interested parents (note that at this meeting all parents are welcome regardless of the ages of their children).
- B. Outcomes:** Parents will take away from the gathering...
- The kind words and blessing of the pastor/principal
 - Ideas and stories from other parents
 - Ideas for parents to support parents, and for the parish/school to support parents
 - Some practical ideas and resources from the SCF Team
 - The commitment to pray for one another
 - Specific plans for next steps
- C. Materials:**
- Refreshments
 - Nametags, markers, pencils, or pens
 - Results of the SCF Parent Response Survey
 - Extra copies of the *Family Faith Resource Booklet* for parents not having one.
 - Easel and newsprint, markers
 - Take home resources and perhaps a small devotional gift
- D. Agenda** (anticipate this to be a two hour gathering)
- 1) **Hospitality** (note this is vital and not to be skipped or rushed)
 - A comfortable, “adult” space, with furniture and environment conducive to a warm, welcoming, and comfortable adult conversation.
 - Food, drink, nametags, and designated greeters with a knack for putting people at ease welcome parents as they arrive. Perhaps some social time before the formal beginning of the meeting (e.g., “come fifteen minutes early for coffee, soft drinks, snacks, and conversation”).
 - 2) **Welcome, introductions and prayer** (5 minutes)
 - *Opening Remarks:* Leader warmly welcomes participants, acknowledges their interest and commitment, and commends them for their decision to come, then briefly explains the outcomes and agenda of the gathering.
 - *Kind Words and Prayer:* Ideally, the pastor/principle would attend at least the first few minutes of the meeting, offer some affirming words, and lead a simple, suitable opening prayer—it is recommended that one of the family prayers found on the back of the Family Faith Resource Booklet serve this purpose.

3) Small Group Formation (15 minutes)

- a) The Leader walks around the entire room calling out a particular wall space for each stage of family life and asks participants who fit that stage to move and stand in that space together as follows:
 - Couple without children
 - Family with mainly pre-school children
 - Family with mainly elementary school children
 - Family with early adolescent children (12-14)
 - Family with mainly older adolescent children (15-18)
 - Family with mainly college-age children (19-23)
 - Family with young adults (mid 20's to mid 30's)
 - Empty-nesters
 - Grandparents
 - Others? (note that leader at this point can affirm any who do not fall into these typical categories, and be sure they feel welcome)
- b) After all are standing, invite them to group up in small groups of 4-5 who are in or near their same family life stage. Once grouped up, they are to find out:
 - What drew them to this parent session?
 - What is one of the biggest change they have experienced as a family in this particular family life stage that was not present in the previous stage of family life?
- c) After 10 minutes, leader invites them to sit at tables as a small group for the remainder of the session. A SCF Team Member should accompany *each small group* at their table to act as a small group guide and recorder. If there are not enough team members, one person in a small group should be invited to act as the group's recorder.

4) Brief survey of participants (10 minutes)

- a) Large Group Leader asks participants to say aloud what they heard when they talked with other parents: Why did you/they come to the gathering? And one significant change for their family life stage (start with the first stage and go in order so those in preceding stage can hear what they should expect next).
- b) The SCF Team Member who prepared the summary of the Parent Response Forms should now be asked to offer that summary highlighting what the team heard when it gathered to discuss the response forms and its experience of the Foundational Parent Sessions.

5) Small group conversations (25 minutes)

- a) Small Group Leaders ask parents to refer to their Family Faith Inventory results located in their *Family Faith Resource Booklet* and invites them to discuss in their small groups:
 - Describe one or two things that you do as a parent with your child(ren) to model and share faith with them—things that you feel really good about.
 - Describe one or two challenges or frustrations that you face as a parent in rearing your child(ren) in the faith.

Small Group Leaders offer the following guidelines:

- The goal is to share our experience, so be sure each person has a chance to talk.
- Try not to get side-tracked, and if you find yourself on a tangent, get back on track with the conversation leads.
- Give each person a chance to talk for three to five minutes. (Leader will be tracking and announcing expiring time.)
- Avoid discussion and especially problem-solving or giving advice; there will be time for that later.
- If there are people in your group who are new to you, be sure to spend a bit of time at the beginning with introductions.
- Groups will have 15-20 minutes.

- b) Leader tracks time and announces when five minutes are left making sure that those who have not yet had a chance to share are able to do so in the time remaining.
- c) At the conclusion of the small group time, the leader invites group members to write down the names of the other persons in the group inside the front cover of their Family Faith Resource Booklets. Group members are asked to hold these people and their families in prayer daily in the weeks ahead.

6) **Break** (10 minutes) – If you decide to show the Domestic Church video from the *Resource Sessions for Parents and Families* page (www.strongcatholicfamilies.org), be sure to prepare that now.

7) **Large group conversation** (30 minutes)

- a) Large Group Leader reconvenes groups after the break and if applicable, introduces the Domestic Church video (4 minutes), inviting parents to think about how their homes are, in fact, small communities of faith.
- b) Large Group Leader explains that helping to make each home a vibrant domestic church is the goal of Strong Catholic Families and that the remainder of the time we have together will be spent on how this larger faith community can best partner with parents to make this happen. To start, each small group will be asked to spend ten minutes discussing each perspective as follows with the SCF Team members recording the input on newsprint.
 - *Parent Perspective*—what can we do as parents to help, support, resource, challenge, nurture, etc. one another in this vital role of being leaders in our own domestic churches and modeling and sharing faith with our children?
 - *Parish/School Perspective*—how can this faith community and its leadership best help, support, resource, challenge and walk with parents to help us build up the domestic church of the home?
- c) Large-group conversation—taking one perspective at a time, the leader asks small groups to share “headlines” of what they talked about.

8) **Next steps in faith (20 minutes):**

- a) Large Group Leader invites small groups to help the SCF Team determine the priority of what the next steps/responses should be for partnering with parents to bring home the faith. Let the parents know that the local SCF Team is on hand to help develop, support, and implement the most desirable responses that arise from this session and subsequent reflections. Some possible next steps might include some from the list below (Leader should review these and have them posted on Newsprint or projected onto a screen).
 - *Parent Networking*: if there is significant need to gather with parents and talk more in depth, then the parish/school leadership could develop strategies to gather parents together on a regular basis that will allow them to share their faith journeys, family faith practices, and other issues and concerns.
 - *Prayer and Faith-Sharing Skills Development*: if the need is for parents to further develop the skills of prayer and faith-sharing, the leadership could offer various approaches to helping parents with this (Note: See Resource Session 2: Sharing Faith at www.strongcatholicfamilies.org).
 - *Theological Updates*: if the need is for parents to better understand their Catholic faith so as to grow in confidence and the capability of talking about that faith with their children, the leadership could recruit volunteers to assist in developing various approaches to helping parents with this.
 - *Understanding the Other Generation*: if the need is to help each generation listen to and better understand the other's needs, hopes, fears, and faults, the leadership could plan on hosting an intergenerational session (Note: See Resource Session 3 at www.strongcatholicfamilies.org).
 - *Parent Faith Sharing Groups*: if the need is for parents to join up with other parents in forming small prayer and faith sharing groups, the leadership could begin organizing these around willing parent leaders and family life stages.
- b) Give small groups 10 minutes to come up with a prioritized list of three next steps they would like to see occur to support them in growing more deeply in faith as a domestic church based on all the responses and feedback they heard during this session. These should be recorded by small group leaders.
- c) Large Group Leader invites each small group leader to call out one of their next steps noting that all will be reviewed and discussed by the SCF Team after today's session.

9) **Parent "Take Away" Resources (5 minutes):** the Large Group Leader highlights helpful resources found in the *Family Faith Resource Booklet* and at www.strongcatholicfamilies.org and other existing resources already owned or used by the faith community. If applicable, a free devotional gift is presented for participating parents.

10) **Leader concludes** the meeting with:

- Concluding remarks expressing gratitude, affirmation, and support.
- Reminder that the local SCF Team will be working to follow up on implementing the directions and ideas that were raised in this session.
- Final reflection question: *what will you do this week to bring this home to help your family live their faith "between the Sundays?"*
- Evaluation of gathering.
- Brief closing prayer (using one of the family prayers from the *Resource Booklet*).