



What is Family Faith Formation?

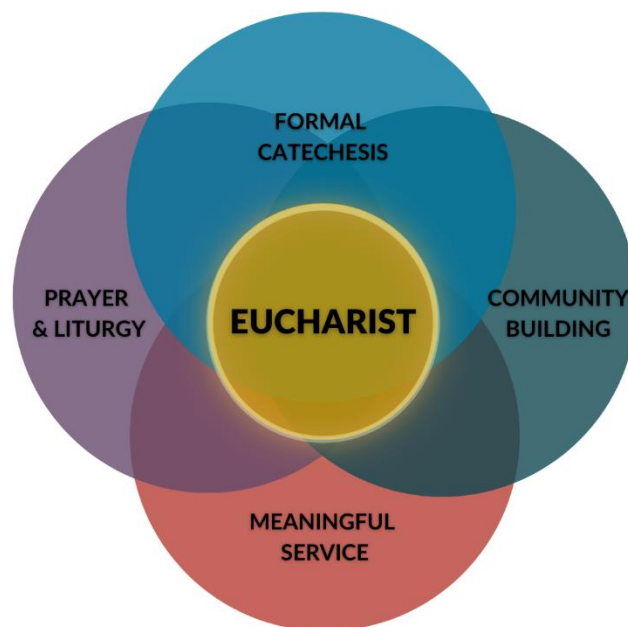
Archbishop Lori's 2022 *Pastoral Note on Faith Formation* defines Family Faith Formation simply as a "pedagogical method that invites parents to take up their role as their child's primary catechist and educator."¹ In the language of many of the magisterial documents of the Pope Francis papacy, Family Faith Formation inspires parents to be the *protagonists* – the driving agents – of their own and their children's formation in Christ and his Church.²

Family Faith Formation accomplishes the goals of *Evangelizing Catechesis*³ by intentionally prioritizing the presence and accompaniment of *parents* and the wider family in the formation of their children.

Family Faith Formation is *not* "just plugging families into what we are already doing" but rather reimagining our catechetical structures and programs to center families.⁴ **We should imagine age-specific ministries as harmonious "spokes" extending out from the "hub" of the family, rather than the family existing on the periphery of our catechetical endeavors.**

Similarly, it has become clear that family faith formation is multidimensional, attending to the whole person in several overlapping modalities. These dimensions are distinct in character, but are experienced as an integrated whole within the life of a parish and the life of a family:

The Integrated Dimensions of Comprehensive Family Faith Formation



DIMENSION 1 – FORMAL CATECHESIS: Intentional, formal catechesis in the context of a family via gathered facilitated experiences⁵ that include parents as well as children.

- While some aspects of Family Faith Formation/Family Ministry may be more casual⁶ Family Catechesis presupposes a certain level of formality:
 - (1) Some form of registration and/or tracking of participation and
 - (2) Stable, consistent relationships built across a period of time (months or even years)
- Family Catechesis requires a defined scope and sequence of catechetical content.⁷
 - Possible modes include 1-year, 2-year, 3-year, or 4-year thematic cycles; correlation to patterns of the liturgical year and/or lectionary cycle is a particularly fitting practice.
 - The expectation is that the richness of the Pillars of the Catechism⁸ (*including the sources of Sacred Scripture, sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium*) be unfolded throughout the chosen cycle in a systematic way.
 - This does not necessitate that every topic be exhausted nor that every Pillar be explored every year; on the contrary, the expectation is that families are given ample time to immerse themselves in one particular teaching at a time and to consider deeply the ways in which that Truth resonates in their day-to-day lives.
- Catechetical content across the age groups should be complementary, though adapted appropriately to the age of the learners.⁹
 - In other words: parents and children should be learning in a way that includes both literal side-by-side experiences (as frequently as can be sensibly accomplished) and functionally allows the entire family to be prepared to discuss the same general catechetical topics when they are together, inside and outside the home.
 - Each gathering should provide age-appropriate opportunities to practice faith-sharing conversations with peers and/or within the family, so as to better prepare parents and children to confidently enter into such conversations in daily life.
 - Parishes must discern reasonable expectations for parental engagement and build the scope and sequence/schedule of gatherings around that parental reality rather than starting with what has been the norm in the past. (This amounts to the difference between merely *including* parents and *prioritizing* them.¹⁰)
- *A note about Sacramental Preparation:* Sacramental Preparation processes should reinforce the family-centered approach described here, and Family Catechesis should offer pride of place to Sacramental encounters as outlined in Dimension 2 (below). However, in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, immediate preparation for the Sacraments must remain a separate process from ordinary ongoing formation.
- CORE MISSION PRIORITIES: Encounter, Accompaniment, Sending, Mission Support

DIMENSION 2 – PRAYER & LITURGY: Accessible, reverent opportunities to encounter Jesus Christ, be captivated by Him, and respond to Him, tailored as necessary and appropriate to enable family participation.¹¹

- When considering the dimension of Prayer & Liturgy, it is paramount that each family's experience of the Sunday Mass is one of accessibility and warm welcome. Parishes must foster this commitment among all clergy, staff, volunteers, and indeed everyone who is present at these liturgies.

- Opportunities for sacramental and liturgical experiences (*e.g., Reconciliation services, Adoration, Liturgy of the Hours*) should be prioritized both within the formal gathered catechetical program and alongside it.¹²
- However, the place of other types of prayer (*e.g., Lectio Divina, spontaneous prayer, prayer with and for one another, formal prayer rooted in the various charisms and methods of prayer in the tradition, and of course traditional rote prayers*) is not to be discounted.
- Appropriate, brief catechesis around each form of prayer must always accompany these experiences; never presume that those present are familiar with how to enter into a particular form of prayer or, indeed, have been intentionally formed in how to pray at all.
- CORE MISSION PRIORITIES: Liturgy, Welcome, Encounter

DIMENSION 3 – COMMUNITY BUILDING: Opportunities to grow in authentic community that are attentive to the varied needs of families.

- Community building entails intentionally helping parents, children, and families to grow in relationships inter- and intra-family and share meaningful experiences and conversations.
- Community building has as its aim the development of authentic “missionary friendships” rooted in Christ, both within and across families. Such friendships, in their fullness, impel disciples outward to share the Gospel beyond the parish building, outside the parish boundaries, and on days other than Sunday.¹³
- When preparing for any community building initiative, leaders must intentionally empower missionary disciples to serve as accompaniers and witnesses in the context of the community building event, program, or initiative.¹⁴ Such disciples should be formed in how to be authentically welcoming and invitational, and must be capable of walking effectively with those who are closer to the margins of the community.
- Parishes should be attentive to opportunities to weave catechetical “moments” into community building events, particularly ensuring that the kerygma (the basic proclamation of the Gospel) is shared frequently and compellingly in this less-formal context.
- Parishes must ensure that administrative burdens (*such as sacramental paperwork and event registrations*) are streamlined to make parish life as accessible as possible to families, particularly those with very young children and school-age children.
- CORE MISSION PRIORITIES: Welcome, Accompaniment, Sending

DIMENSION 4 – MEANINGFUL SERVICE: Meaningful, accessible opportunities to serve alongside one another as a family (particularly prioritizing service to and with the poor and vulnerable), wherein families are intentionally guided to see how their service connects to Jesus and His mission.¹⁵

- These opportunities must include relevant discussion and authentic catechesis founded on the four principles of Catholic social teaching¹⁶ and the works of mercy (both corporal and spiritual).
- The service opportunities must be imbued with a humble spirit of missionary hope for Christ’s transformation of the individual and society.
- Facilitators should strive to avoid reinforcing ideological and political barriers (be they real or perceived) to the full embrace of the Church’s teaching and instead continually point back its Christocentric, unified anthropology.
- CORE MISSION PRIORITIES: Encounter, Sending

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

It is applicable to many needs in the parish/pastorate, but it is the recommended process for those implementing Family Faith Formation in parishes/pastorates.



Stage 1 – Pray & Listen: Engage a team of people in intentional intercessory prayer and purposeful sacred listening over a sustained period of time, in order to discern God’s desires for this program, process, or initiative. Spend significant time and energy listening to God and to parents in your community. Stage 1 is the absolutely essential foundation of the process, and continues as a vital element woven throughout the entire cycle.^a

Stage 2 – Explore & Imagine: Invite the Holy Spirit as you investigate existing methods and resources^b, ponder possible creative adaptations, and envision innovative new approaches.

Stage 3 – Discern & Plan: Redouble prayer efforts and more deeply engage the whole team in assessing Stage 2’s possibilities in light of Stage 1’s insights. As the objectives become clear and the plan takes shape, continue to immerse the planning process in prayer and listening.^c

Stage 4 – Execute & Document: Implement the plan. With the Lord’s help, make a point to notice and record areas of fruitfulness and areas to adjust in order to better meet the objectives. Invite and record feedback from key stakeholders.

Stage 5 – Evaluate & Iterate: With key stakeholders, assess the initiative’s fruitfulness. Repeat the cycle, first by bringing fresh insights from Stage 4 into the Lord’s ongoing conversation with your intercessory prayer team, and then listening in a more targeted way for others’ insights into the challenges that persist.^d

^a Listening entails conversations one-on-one or in very small groups (with invested, marginal, and disinvested parents, representative of the parish’s cultural makeup). What moves these parents’ hearts? What might compel them to more fully embrace their role as protagonists, active agents in their formation and that of their children?

^b Including catechetical materials, but also staff/volunteer ministers (actual and potential), facilities, finances, etc.

^c Consider the implications of your plan on safety. If you are making significant structural changes to programs or are unsure of how the policies/procedures apply, consult Child & Youth Protection/Risk Management accordingly.

^d Implement intentional, objective measures to assess how participants of all ages are progressing (or not) along your parish’s discipleship pathway. Such metrics may not be readily available, nor do most resources provide adequate tools to gather these particular data; consultation with the Institute for Evangelization is advised.

References:

¹ *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT), no. 68.

² *Directory for Catechesis* (DFC), nos. 4, 124, and 262;

³ “Evangelizing Catechesis” is defined by the USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis (with reference to DFC, nos. 55, 56, 2, 3, 4, & 60) at <https://www.usccb.org/committees/evangelization-catechesis>

⁴ *A Light Brightly Visible 2.0* (LBV 2.0), section IV: “We should not hesitate to ask which approaches are effective and which are not. Instead of watering down our message and our teaching, let us consider how we can present a more ample picture of the truth and beauty of the Church’s faith, worship, and service to our young people, to their parents, and to young adults.”

⁵ DFC, no. 371.

⁶ *Listen, Teach, Send: A National Pastoral Framework for Ministries with Youth and Young Adults* (2024), page 27: “...formation can and should take place in the home as parents, grandparents, and families share the Catholic faith with their sons and daughters; it may also occur within religious education or classroom settings, in youth or young adult ministries, in informal dialogue groups, one-on-one conversations, dynamic presentations, online learning, and post-event processing, through visual art, theater, or music, and during the sacramental preparation for Confirmation, Marriage, or the Baptism of children of young adults. There are many learning styles and educational methods that can be used in the proclamation of faith.”

⁷ CT, no. 30; for those concerned with the question of “how much catechetical content is ‘enough’?” this passage from *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 21 may be illuminating:

“In view of practical difficulties, attention must be drawn to some of the characteristics of this instruction:

- It must be systematic, not improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal;
- It must deal with essentials, without any claim to tackle all disputed questions or to transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis;
- It must nevertheless be sufficiently complete, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the kerygma;
- It must be an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life.”

⁸ Catechesis based upon the Four Pillars of the Catechism necessarily includes attention to the breadth of Revelation: sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium; Cf. CCC, nos. 13 & 95.

⁹ CT, no. 45.

¹⁰ CT, no. 43; DFC, no. 422: “This is therefore not a matter of adding on a few activities intended for adults along with the catechesis of children and teenagers, but of a fresh understanding of catechetical activity as a whole.”

¹¹ LBV 2.0, section III: “Families that take time to pray together, that grow together in faith, and live the Gospel joyfully and generously—such families by no means avoid hardship and suffering—but often in those moments their faith and love glows even more brightly.”

¹² CT, no. 23.

¹³ CT, no. 24.

¹⁴ DFC, no. 33.

¹⁵ LBV 2.0, section IV: “...as parish communities perform ministries of charity and service on behalf of those in need, these communities are indeed bearing witness to Christ.”

¹⁶ The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (no. 160) lists four foundational *principles*: (1) the dignity of the human person, (2) the common good, (3) solidarity and (4) subsidiarity. These principles apply in all circumstances, whereas the seven *themes* of Catholic social teaching rest upon these more fundamental principles.