

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Early Childhood follows from infant baptism through the enrollment of the child into an organized faith formation at a parish. We know from our research that parishes that engage this age group are three times more likely to retain the family of these children in the life of the parish. In fact, the same recommendation was made in 1976 by the bishops of the United States. Unfortunately, early childhood formation was never widely adopted. We seek to stem that tide and encourage all parishes to engage this forgotten demographic.

Indicators for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Early Childhood

The numbers after each indicator refer to the corresponding Task of Catechesis, which can be found on page 32

- ❑ We offer opportunities for young children (ages 0-5) to encounter Christ through age appropriate activities that are family and parish-based. (1,5,6)
- ❑ We provide opportunities and environments to teach children how to pray, learn different prayer styles and encourage community prayer experiences with their families and friends. (4)
- ❑ We help children to understand scripture through reading, picture, the environment and their senses. (1)
- ❑ We offer service opportunities for both families and children, to begin to understand what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. (5,6)
- ❑ We appropriately prepare parents to comprehend, pass on and continue to cultivate the faith in their child. (5,6)
- ❑ We provide events where parents and their children can learn and share their faith together. (1,5)
- ❑ We accompany parents and their children on their journey of faith and introduce them to ways of following the life of Jesus. (1,3)
- ❑ We assist parents on how to teach and model a moral life to their children so they become images of Christ to each other and in the world. (3)
- ❑ We celebrate the contributions of parents, their children and the milestones they achieve in the larger parish community. (5)
- ❑ We continue to offer ongoing parent formation so they can continue to be the primary educators of their children in the faith. (1,5)



The book, *Growing Up Religious*, was written by Robert Wuthnow to discover the nature of the new winds blowing in the spirituality of Americans. Though it was written a generation ago, its lessons hold true today. Wuthnow reports that adults who are still “religious” (attending services, practicing their faith) have four things in common: they were taught to pray as children, there were sacred objects in their homes, their families ate meals together, and their parents told of their own faith experiences.

“ Says Wuthnow, *Effective religious socialization comes about through embedded practices that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines, of eating and sleeping, of having conversations, of adorning the spaces in which people live, of celebrating the holidays, and of being part of a community. Compared with these practices, the formal teachings of religious leaders often pale in significance. Yet when such practices happen, formal teachings also become more important.* ”

Recommendations for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Early Childhood

Early Childhood Catechesis strives to assist each child to deepen their faith by:

- ☐ Developing a sense of wonder about the world around them
- ☐ Becoming more sensitive to the spiritual
- ☐ Helping them become aware of the attitudes and elements of worship
- ☐ Helping them become aware of the presence of God in themselves, others and the world
- ☐ Developing an awareness of the community of Church and their belonging
- ☐ Experiencing the joy and ease of spontaneous prayer
- ☐ Coming to know that God is loving and caring
- ☐ Helping young children begin to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ

Early Childhood Catechesis encourages parents to grow in their faith by:

- ☐ Showing that parent involvement is essential for the development of the child and family as a whole
- ☐ Inviting parents to attend early childhood faith formation instruction sessions along with the DRE/CRE and other volunteers to assist them in passing on the faith
- ☐ Helping parents to realize they are the primary religious educators and are responsible for instilling religious and spiritual values to their child
- ☐ Encouraging parents to practice their faith with their children both within the Church community and at home

Early Childhood Catechists and Parents assist children to deepen their faith by:

- ☐ Encouraging Catechists and parents to work as spiritual teams to help all family members grow in their faith
- ☐ Allowing parents to take on catechetical roles within the Faith Formation program to sharpen their skills and to help build community
- ☐ Encouraging ongoing instruction and participation in Faith Formation sessions with both Catechists and parents attending for support and perspective on what is needed
- ☐ Encouraging all those involved in the formation process to pray, spend time in community and support each other's role

Early Childhood Catechesis strives to encourage participation from the parish as a whole by:

- ☐ Promoting and encouraging the parish community to support those family-based activities that develop a deeper understanding of God with children
- ☐ Assisting in developing and supporting a Sunday Pre-School formation program if one does not exist
- ☐ Supporting the recruitment of an Early Childhood Coordinator to focus strictly on formation of young families and their children
- ☐ Utilizing all resources available, i.e. diocesan personnel, website, educational workshops, etc.

