

## THE CHANGING FACE OF THE CATHOLIC FAMILY

Once upon a time, the church building was not only in the center of town, but the faith community was the center of a family. Parishes were tied to cultures and ethnicities and families walked to Mass together.

Those days are long gone. Our parishes are ethnically and culturally diverse so we must reimagine how we can welcome our families to be the center of lifelong faith formation they are called to be. Saint John Paul II called the family, “the Church in miniature.” How then, can this Domestic Church effectively accomplish this important task? Perhaps naming the current reality will help.

Holy Cross Family Ministries and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University teamed up for a four-part study on Catholic parents and families leading up the World Meeting of Families in September 2015.

Among the results:

- Catholic families are more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than the overall Catholic population. About 53 percent of all Catholic parents self-identified as Hispanic or Latino compared with 32 percent of all Catholics.
- Most Catholic children are being raised by married Catholic parents – about eight in ten Catholic mothers and fathers are married and less than 1 percent are widowed, while about 3 percent have never been married and 13 percent are single and living with a partner.
- Frequency of Mass attendance is similar between Catholic parents and all adult Catholics – about 22 percent – yet a larger proportion of Catholic parents attend Mass less than once a week. Catholic parents with three or more children are much more likely to attend Mass at least once a month.

- While more than 93 percent of parents say it is very important for their children to celebrate Sacraments, most Catholic parents do not have their children enrolled in Catholic school-based or a parish-based religious education programs. In all, more than two-thirds, 68 percent, do not have any of their children enrolled in formal Catholic religious education.
- About 66 percent of parents say that it is very important for their children to celebrate First Communion, while only 61 give the same importance to Confirmation.
- Overall, 71 percent of parents agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that prayer is essential to their faith. Only about 36 percent pray at least once a day, however. An additional 23 percent pray at least once a week.
- And when they pray, parents most commonly pray for the wellbeing of their families (83 percent). Only 16 percent of parents say they pray the Rosary at least once a month.
- More than four in ten Catholic parents read their church bulletin.

If faith formation is a family affair – and it should be – let us work together to embolden the families in our parish to take on this task. The face of our parishes continues to change. But our young people report that they seek the same thing our adults seek: consciousness of God, belonging to a community that welcomes them and values their input. As we look around, we realize that a new language gives way to a new concept of what is necessary. Because there has been a loss of a common community, a common culture, and a common vocabulary, we must reimagine faith formation and begin anew.

*\*Source: <https://www.avemariapress.com/news/2015/7/6/hcfm-cara-study-family>*

## NO FAMILY IS BROKEN

When a couple marries, no one expects the journey to end in separation or divorce. Parishes must be sensitive to the needs of those experiencing the pain of divorce or separation. Through support and empathy, prayer and spirituality, and service to others, these men and women find hope to begin the road to acceptance and healing.

Parishes are encouraged to offer opportunities for those affected by divorce or separation a place to meet, prayerful support, and opportunities for socialization.

Only by accompanying one another may we rediscover a deeper faith and renewed relationship with God.



## Indicators for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Families

- ☐ We offer opportunities for families to encounter Christ through parish missions, opportunities to receive the Sacraments, prayer experiences, and the witness of other families of the community. (1,5,6) (see *Encounter* section)
- ☐ We give families the skills and opportunities to create a home rooted in prayer through teaching them about family prayer and popular devotions in their home: the domestic church. (1,3,5)
- ☐ We give families the skills and opportunities to study and reflect upon Scripture together as a family. (1,5)
- ☐ We seek to empower families to live lives of service by caring for others, reaching out to those in need and educating for peace, justice and human dignity. (1,6)
- ☐ We actively invite families to regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation through penance services, frequent reminders and readily available priests to hear them. (2,3,4)
- ☐ We offer opportunities and direction for families to adore Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. (2,4)
- ☐ We assist families in participating fully, consciously and actively in the Mass through education and engaging liturgies. (1,2,4)
- ☐ We help form in families a moral responsibility that allows them to apply Christian ethics, virtues and principles to moral decision making in their everyday actions of daily life and to teach their children to do the same. (3)
- ☐ We give families the tools to explore God's call for their vocation to marriage and to help their children discover their vocation through prayer, reflection and discernment. (1,4,6)
- ☐ We actively invite all family members to discern how they can use their gifts to actively participate in the life, mission and work of the Catholic Church. (5,6)
- ☐ We give families opportunities to explore how God is present in their own lives, the lives of others, and the world around them. (1,4,5,6)
- ☐ We accompany families on their journey of faith by inviting them to be a part of a parish community that the feel at home in. (5,6) (see *Accompaniment* section)
- ☐ We celebrate both the sacramental and personal milestones in the lives of adults and their families to the larger community. (2,5)
- ☐ We provide support for families in times of crisis. (2,5)
- ☐ We offer opportunities for families to celebrate their diverse cultures in the larger community through cultural celebrations. (5,6)
- ☐ We give families the tools and opportunities to live out their lives as disciples of Christ in the world today by sharing of their faith. (1,2,3,4,5,6)
- ☐ We are intentional about making connections between the parish church and the diocesan and universal church. (5,6)
- ☐ We offer opportunities specifically for those who are divorced and/or remarried. (2,5)
- ☐ We encourage and support vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. (2,5)

## Recommendations for Effective Pastoral Ministry: Families

### Provide opportunities to deepen their prayer life through various prayer experiences

- ☐ Private prayers and communal, shared prayer
- ☐ Retreats
- ☐ Scripture reading
- ☐ Reception of the sacraments
- ☐ Family Bible projects
- ☐ Eucharistic Adoration

### Equip adults to be primary educators of their children

- ☐ Teach them how to explain their faith to their children
- ☐ Show them how to apply Christian principles to moral decision making in their everyday actions of daily life – and how to teach their children to do the same
- ☐ Help them to have the answers to common questions of their children at various ages, especially on contemporary topics

### Use media and technology to keep them informed and connected

- ☐ Text alerts with prayers, articles, or short reflections
- ☐ Ability to opt into other groups (men's group, women's group, dads, moms, single parents, widows, etc.)
- ☐ Engaging resources for the home (book lists, recommended movies, etc.)

### Effectively communicate with couples on a regular basis

- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Website
- ☐ Email/text blasts

### Invite them into the greater parish community

- ☐ Picnics, social events, carnival, etc.
- ☐ Celebrate feast days together
- ☐ Unite with them in prayer during their good times and hard times
- ☐ Respond to their needs in times of crisis – loss of child, divorce, addiction, financial struggle, etc.