



WALKING WITH FAMILIES IN SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

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RESOURCES FOR NOURISHING ADULT FAITH IN GOD



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In 2005 the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales commissioned the Marriage and Family Life Project Office to clarify the role of parents and grandparents in passing on faith in God and to resource them accordingly. This followed the findings of Listening 2004 in which families shared their joys, difficulties and hopes of the Church. But it arises from the Church's understanding of the foundational role that families play in evangelisation - sharing the good news of Jesus Christ - in all that they do, say and believe, in their love for one another and for God.

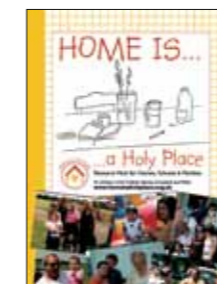
This booklet has been produced to resource the bishops' evangelisation initiative Proclaim '15. Here we summarise the research findings of *Partners in a Shared Task* and other research into the ways that families pass on faith in God. But first we list core resources for supporting families in their loving, evangelising mission.

This booklet is not an exhaustive guide but a starting point. The resources included are sensitive to the graces with which God has blessed families, respectful of their vocation to love and cognisant of the Church's understanding of family ministry, a task of the whole people of God in local communities. Family ministry equips families to be, as Saint John Paul II put it, leaders of a new season of hope, for the Church and for the world.

"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."
1 Corinthians 13:1-3

When parents were asked about...

...how they pass faith in God on to their children they talked about setting a good example of their own faith. They used phrases such as "it's how we live our lives", "setting an example in life", being "a good role model" and "first of all witness. That speaks more to me than words." The importance of parents and grandparents having a strong and maturing personal faith in God emerges as critical in the research. None of us can pass on something we don't have. This does not necessarily equate to having a vast factual knowledge of the faith. It does imply that offering parents and grandparents opportunities to love God more fully, both through reflecting on scripture and growing in awareness of God's presence in their everyday lives, is fundamental to supporting families in their evangelising role. Giving good example is very much about being a person of faith, about loving God and trusting in God who is loving and merciful.



The Home is a Holy Place Resource Pack

Home is a Holy Place is designed to raise awareness of the holiness of family life through a focus on three key areas: the love that is God shared within a family; the quality of the relationships through which that love is communicated; the presence of God in all creation, particularly focussing on the sacramentality of family life. It works extremely well in reaching out to families because it affirms the significance of everyday family life in all its messiness. This is a multimedia resource pack primarily for use with adults, in family or other inter-generational groups, within a variety of home, school, organisation and parish settings. A copy for every parish was produced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales as a response to Listening 2004. The pack includes a vision booklet, a 25 minute DVD which can be viewed in its entirety or in sections, six group conversation resources, Family - Adventure in Love (a family-friendly form of Church teaching on their role and mission) and prayer cards. The pack is available free of charge online at www.homeisaholyplace.org.uk.

Healing ministries

The term 'holy' is derived from the Old English word 'halig', an adjective derived from *hāl* meaning "whole". In the spirit of this sense of wholeness, many forms of healing ministry are critical to the development of



mature adult faith. It is important to see these examples and other healing ministries in the context of passing on faith in God:

- **The Mental Health Project:** www.mentalhealthproject.co.uk
- **CEDAR: Catholics Experiencing Domestic Abuse Resources:** www.cedar.uk.net
- **Marriage Care:** www.marriagecare.org.uk
- **Acorn Christian Healing Foundation:** www.acornchristian.org
- **Rainbows Bereavement Support:** www.rainbowsgb.org

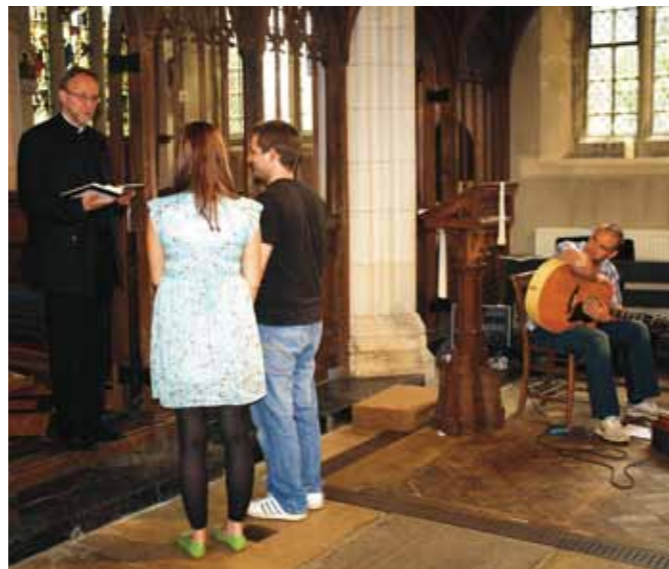
Counting Our Blessings (Forthcoming)

A series of small-group materials for use in evangelisation and catechesis that use 'the real questions' of family life as the starting point for Lectio Divina reflections on God's presence throughout the ups and downs. This will be available from the Marriage & Family Life Project Office in 2016. Contact Caroline Dollard for more information: caroline.dollard@cbcew.org.uk

RESOURCES FOR EQUIPPING PARENTS AS FIRST TEACHERS

When parents were asked about...

...how they pass faith in God on to their children they also talked about the importance of the values practised at home. They described these as: *talking, loving, providing continuity, encouragement - no matter what, welcoming, being non-judgemental, working at relationships, meeting people where they are, creating a safe place for every kind of conversation, apologising, forgiving, sharing family meals and story-telling.* The practice of living faith, living what we believe, is demanding, especially if that faith is not always shared with others at home. This is where relationship education emerges as critical. Parenting programmes - and marriage preparation courses - equip parents to communicate, negotiate and reconcile differences more confidently, setting boundaries, loving their children more fully in both 'soft' and 'firm' ways.



From Pram to Primary School, Primary to Pre-Teen, Teen-Parenting and What Does God Expect of Parents?

Although there are many parenting programmes on the market, those produced by Family Caring Trust have a strong Christian value base, are inexpensive and simple to deliver and have options for including explicitly Christian content. The programmes last 6-8 weeks and focus on improving the quality of communication in the family and balancing the firm and soft elements of parental love. Facilitators

do not need any special knowledge of child or adult psychology as the kits provide all that is needed to deliver the programmes. Dioceses have been funded to deliver support to parents using these materials, with very positive feedback in terms of personal, family and community development.

"This works! People are hungry for this and flourish when fed. They thrive when affirmed, encouraged and supported. Touching people in one area of their lives (parenting) can have resounding, unexpected and wonderful consequences elsewhere, most of which we will never know."
Breda Theakston, Diocese of Leeds.

These programmes are available from:
www.familycaring.co.uk

Marriage Preparation and Enrichment

Marriage preparation programmes that equip couples to communicate effectively and resolve differences will also equip them to communicate faith more effectively with their children. Programmes that enable the couple to explore the Church's teaching on marriage and marital spirituality also equip couples to become more confident in faith sharing at home. Furthermore, enrichment opportunities after the wedding are just as important for supporting couples in passing on faith to their children. Examples include Teams of Our Lady, Marriage Encounter, Association of Interchurch Families, Cana retreats provided by the Chemin Neuf Community. See www.catholicmarriage.org.uk for more information.



WHEN DO FAMILIES EVANGELISE?

Family theologian David M. Thomas suggests that families evangelise when:

- They treat their children with respect and kindness
- They bring God into their family conversation when it feels appropriate
- They share with their children their own worries as well as their hopes
- They speak well of all people
- They take an interest in the world of their children
- They speak of death and illness with Christian hope
- They work alongside their children in doing some of the housework
- They express love and affection for their children
- They pray together as a family
- They find meaningful ways to help the needy of the world
- They monitor and talk about what's being offered by the media
- They care for pets and their property
- They joyfully attend parish events
- They take time to have fun with each other
- They try to keep connected with family members at a distance
- They really celebrate birthdays and other important anniversaries
- They try to notice if anyone in the family feels down or sad
- They share food with each other at any time of the day or night
- They watch TV commercials together and discuss their messages
- They take walks together in sunshine, rain and snow

RESOURCES FOR EXPLICITLY PRACTISING FAITH AT HOME



When parents were asked about...

...how they pass faith in God on to their children they also talked about more explicit faith practices such as prayer, imagery and conversations about God: "saying prayers with children at home", "setting up a crib at Christmas or a statue in the corner", "keeping Sunday special", "facilitate opportunity for God to act/plant seed of faith", and answering children's questions "giving a religious context to their lives". There are many resources available to support families in this aspect of evangelisation, though effectiveness still depends heavily on the quality of relationships at home, especially in parenting.

The Wednesday Word

The Wednesday Word is a resource for families given to them through their children's school or their parish. The primary school version of *The Wednesday Word* is a double-sided A4 leaflet which carries the Sunday Gospel into family homes. The children receive the leaflet in school each week for them to take home with them to read with the rest of the family. *Wednesday Word* Family Time presents an opportunity for even the busiest of parents to spend a very special 5 minutes together with their children each week. Every Wednesday a 'word', inspired by the coming Sunday's Gospel, is suggested for families to talk about in the home. *The Wednesday Word* Family Time leaflet is designed in a family friendly fashion to ensure that all family members feel included. It aims to be informative, enjoyable, and to help families maintain a special closeness throughout the school years. (From The Wednesday Word website). This resource is available from www.wednesdayword.org

Catholic Tradition Alive at Home

Catholic Tradition Alive at Home is a series of 13 A5 wipe-clean recipe cards produced in the Diocese of Plymouth to help families practice their faith together at home, building on time-honoured Catholic traditions.

The cards range from 'Making the Sign of the Cross' to 'Blessing a Home' to 'Remembrance - Especially in November' to 'Making a Prayer Corner'. Each card explores the rationale behind each tradition, referencing scripture in some cases. Simple family prayers are offered as well as some 'top tips' to help families share these traditions within their busy family lives. These resources are available from the Diocese of Plymouth Vicariate for Evangelisation, Catechesis and Schools.

Enjoy Praying

A Family Caring Trust resource which helps parents become more confident in leading family prayer at home through experiencing different ways of praying with Scripture. Delivered over four weeks the course follows the same method as the Trust's parenting programmes. This resource is available from www.familycaring.co.uk

"In the family, faith accompanies every age of life, beginning with childhood: children learn to trust in the love of their parents. This is why it is so important that within their families parents encourage shared expressions of faith which can help children gradually to mature in their own faith".

Pope Francis, *The Light of Faith*, #53

RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING PARENTS IN THE WIDER CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY



When parents were asked about...

...how they pass faith in God on to their children they also described "going to church", "bringing children and even very young to Mass. Getting involved in parish life" and sending children "to a Catholic school." Parents own attitudes to the parish and school community will be picked up by their children. Clearly important is the need for parishes to be welcoming, friendly and family-sensitive. The resources developed as part of the Everybody's Welcome national project support parishes in thinking through what this might mean in terms of pastoral practices. Specifically, Everybody's Welcome aims to better equip parishes to offer understanding, friendship and support, to be a source of help in times of need, to help everyone in the parish feel that they belong and to encourage and celebrate all family life whether married, widowed, single, divorced, separated, with children or without. Not everybody feels known, loved or accepted by their parish community. A range of families in particular situations experience additional difficulties in their parish. Families need parishes to be sensitive to the pressures of family life when timetabling events and inviting their involvement in parish life. Further information is available at www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk.

Family Groups Movement

Of all the resources developed for Everybody's Welcome, Family Groups is potentially the most rich. The aim of Family Groups is to build up the Christian community

by enabling families to get to know each other better, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Open to everyone, these groups create an extended family atmosphere within a parish. The focus is on people caring for, loving and accepting each other, inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ: 'Love one another as I have loved you'. Family Groups comprise up to 10-12 families of any stage and structure who simply commit to meeting up together once a month for social activities. In this way relationships between families are strengthened and they are able to enjoy the mutual informal support that like-minded friends can offer. This is the kind of informal support envisaged in Familiaris Consortio as the most effective form of pastoral care of marriage and family life (#69). Further details are available from:

www.catholicfamily.org.uk

or the Steering Group at

familygroups2015@gmail.com



Creative Ways of Being Church: helping others belong

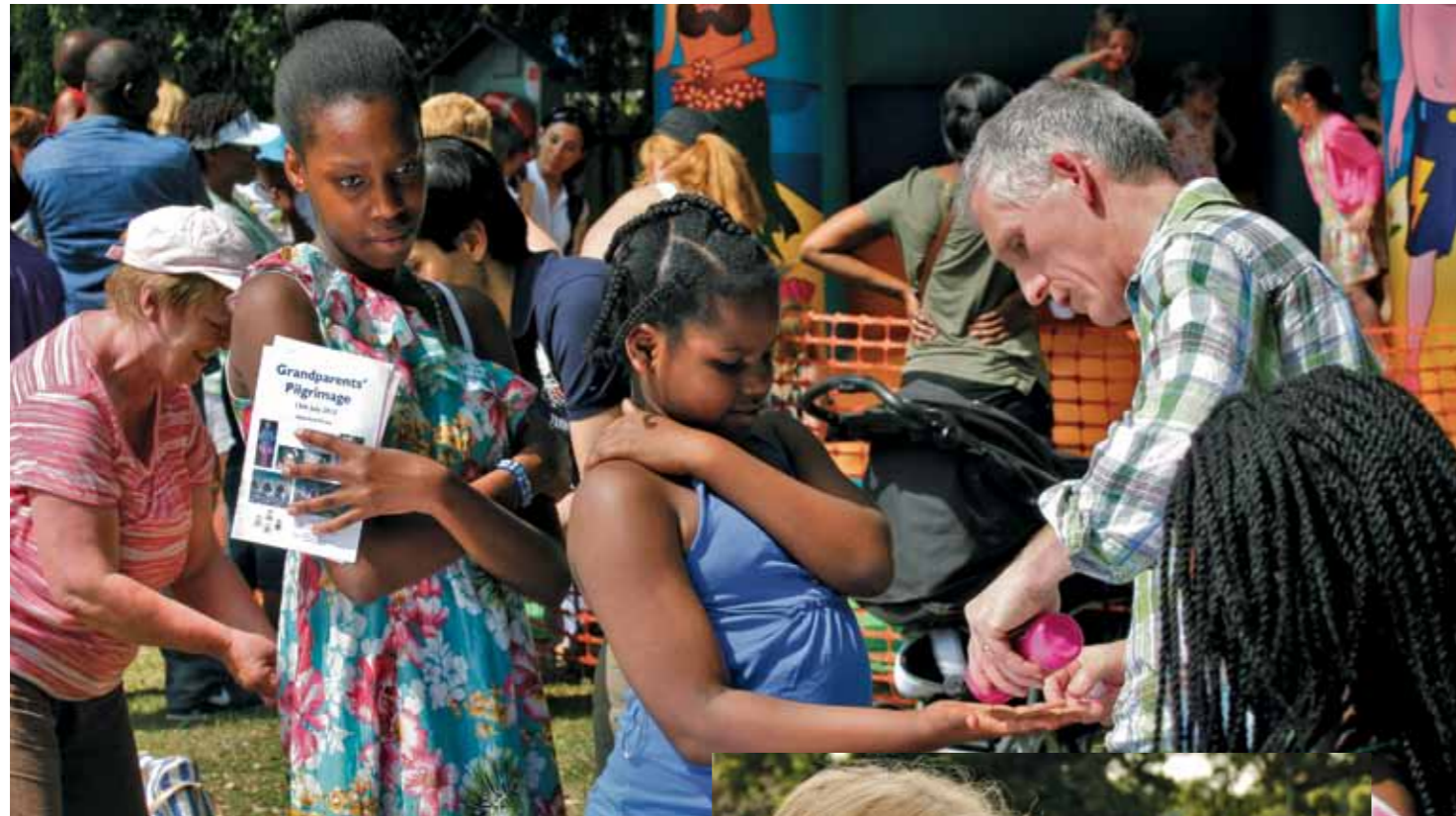
'Creative Ways of Being Church - helping others belong' is a pack of resources developed in the diocese of Plymouth designed to bridge the gap between parish and family life.

The resource suggests a series of events through which parishioners can get to know each other better. Some events may be quite small, some are larger, all are designed to slot into everyday life rather than being a special 'church event'. There are useful tips such as sending out personal invitations, rather than asking people to sign up on a board. As the resource explains: "We should not be strangers. It is our common lived experience which enables us to better serve, celebrate, proclaim and learn the wisdom of the Church and one another. Gathering, either in a big or small way, without an agenda other than getting to know one another as a fellow follower of Christ, goes a long way to developing true community."

The resource is available from the Diocese of Plymouth Vicariate for Evangelisation, Catechesis and Schools.



RESOURCES FOR GRANDPARENTS



The role of grandparents in families...

...where children have no other means of learning about God and about God's love for them is becoming more deeply appreciated. Dioceses have been exploring the development of Grandparents Groups aligned with the Catholic Grandparents Association in order to provide grandparents with peer and prayer support, a safe space in which to share concerns and receive encouragement. The grandparents' role is especially sensitive so providing prayerful opportunities for mutual support and encouragement is an important ministry.

"The Diocese is developing a network of groups of grandparents who meet to support each other and to pray for their grandchildren. The aims are to:

- Help grandparents pass on their faith to the next generation and so sustain and support them in their own faith.
- Keep prayer in the heart of family life
- Create awareness of the vital contribution that grandparents make to church, family and society
- Let grandparents know they are valued and supported

- Create positive, memorable and joyful experiences for grandparents and grandchildren
- The structure for the groups can be varied but we would hope that within each session the Papal prayer for grandparents would be said, prayers for grandchildren would be offered and those grandparents who are alone and isolated would be remembered." Diocese of Arundel & Brighton

For more information see
www.catholicgrandparentsassociation.org
www.catholicfamily.org.uk



TIPS FOR WORKING WITH PARENTS

The need to 'tell it as it is'

Conversations with and between parents on evangelisation have flowed more freely when facilitators were able to share their own doubts and perceived failings as faith-parents. The ability to 'tell it as it is' in an open and honest way, without guile, seems to be essential if parents are to be put at ease and fears of judgment allayed. Being authentic when working with families means telling it as it is and being aware and sensitive to the diversity of how it is for different families. Acknowledging this from the start, helps us to practice "this 'art of accompaniment' which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other" (EG #169).

Listening is the key skill here. Invite parents to tell it as it is for them and then listen well. Be aware though that many older parents and grandparents are carrying tremendous burdens of guilt and grief resulting from their sense of having failed to pass on faith in God effectively. These burdens deserve a safe space in which to be set down, re-examined and placed into God's hands.

Lost in translation

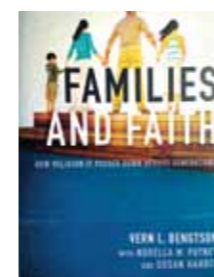
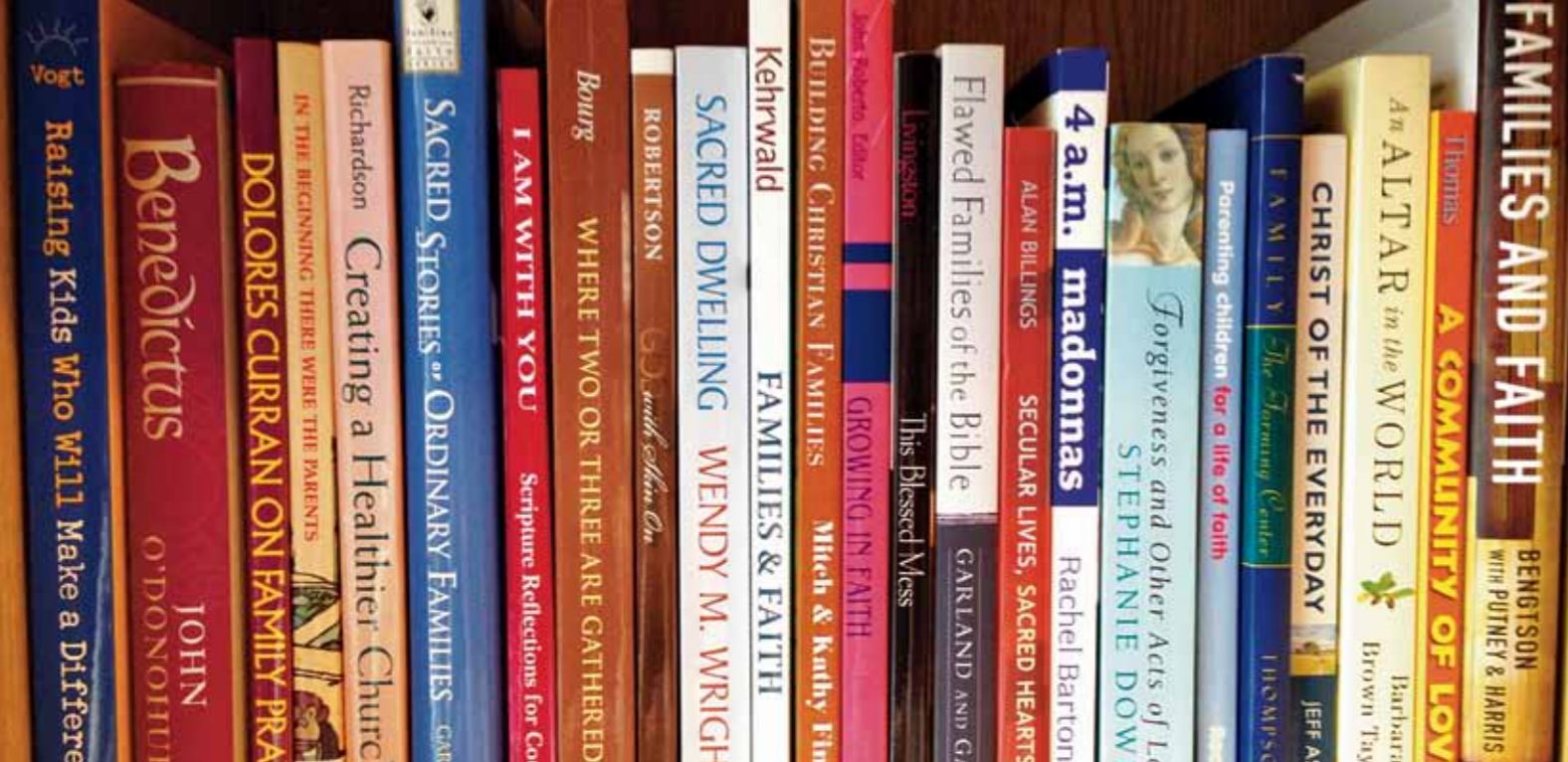
The language that we use in Church, to describe our faith, our values, our spirituality and our relationship with God, can be obscure and inaccessible. Many responses to the pre-Synod consultations testified to this. Similarly, many spiritual experiences described by parents and grandparents might not seem so extraordinary because they are expressed in ordinary words. Some research points to a lack of 'religious literacy' among parents. The risks of misunderstandings arising in the partnership of home,



school and parish are considerable, because much is lost in translation – in both directions. Until we can find a common language we might imagine a crisis in family evangelisation that simply does not exist.

For example, the Church teaches that the family is an intimate community of life and love and that the primary task of the family is to nourish the love between the different members (Familiaris Consortio #18). Families seem to be doing this perfectly well, making choices that respect the primacy of family togetherness. Listening to families reveals many awe-inspiring stories of loving one another through thick and thin, even in the direst circumstances. What more does God ask of them?

"Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God."
Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel #272



Families and Faith

Thirty-five years ago, Vern Bengtson began examining the religious beliefs and practices of more than 3,500 grandparents, parents, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. These efforts have culminated in his study, *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down across Generations*

(Oxford University Press, 2013). The book looks at how parents seek to reproduce religious faith in their children amid an increasingly individualistic society.

In an interview with Christianity Today magazine Bengtson described some of his findings: "One fairly obvious thing, more obvious than I expected, lies in parents who provide consistent modeling. If the parents aren't consistent, the kids won't have religious role models to emulate. In other words, don't just send your children to church, bring them!

The second thing we found was that the quality

of the relationship between the child and the parent affects the success or lack of success in transmission. Warm, affirming parents, especially fathers, tend to be the most successful. Again and again, we saw that fervent faith cannot compensate for a distant, inflexible dad. Being a role model is irrelevant if the child doesn't feel the parent's example is worth following.... we found that allowing children religious choice can encourage religious continuity...

First and foremost, love [your prodigals]. Keep a loving, open relationship. This is going to be very difficult, because chances are there is a lot of pain on both sides. Well, love them anyway, and remember that people change; kids grow up and grow old. Have some faith in the course of life. Frequently, a rebellious, antagonistic stance in an 18-year-old mellows considerably by the time that 18-year-old marries and has children. Prodigals do return to the fold, and some of it is simply a consequence of aging."

www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/august-web-only/religion-runs-in-family.html

BACKGROUND READING

Passing on the Faith



A need to clarify and support the evangelising role of parents and grandparents emerged during Listening 2004 as families across England and Wales described:

- **The importance of faith in God as a sustaining factor in their family life:** families shared how critical gospel values were in their lives and how their faith in God was experienced as a source of personal strength, offering hope, comfort and sustenance.
- **Deep anxiety around passing on faith in God:** alongside families' valuing of faith, and perhaps related to it, was a profound sense of concern about how best to pass faith on to the next generations.
- **This anxiety is exacerbated by an absence of understanding and agreement:** this concern was further complicated by the variety of perspectives reflected in the conversations around passing on the faith.
- **A prevailing sense of grief:** very clear was a profound sense of grief pervading the Catholic community where passing on the faith is concerned.

Partners in a Shared Task

In order to reach understanding and agreement on the role of parents and grandparents in passing on faith a series of conversations between them and priests, catechists, teachers and head-teachers took place in 2010 in the dioceses of Liverpool, Middlesbrough and Plymouth. These voices in the

home-school-parish partnership met to consider a) their own role in passing on faith, b) the support they needed to fulfil their role c) the role of the other two partners and d) their part in supporting those partners. From these conversations it emerged that each of the home-school-parish partners see the role of parents as four-fold:

- **Modelling their own faith in God**
- **Putting this faith into practice at home**
- **Explicitly articulating faith at home**
- **Introducing children into the life of the wider Christian community**

The conversations also pointed to factors which challenge effective partnerships between home, school and parish:

- A: The need to 'tell it as it is'**
- B: The risks of being 'lost in translation'**

These Partners conversations can be replicated in any community across the home school parish partnership, creating a warm and friendly environment for listening to each other and together planning a response that meets the needs of the families. See www.catholicfamily.org.uk for resources.

"It is one thing to pass on the faith, and another to teach the matters of faith. Faith is a gift: it is not possible to study Faith. We study the things of faith, yes, to understand it better, but with study [alone] one never comes to Faith. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, which surpasses all ["academic"] formation".

Pope Francis, January 26, 2015

EIGHT FAMILY QUALITIES

According to the Search Institute an extensive body of research suggests that eight aspects of family life are particularly crucial for effectively developing the faith life of children:

1. **Parental harmony.** Parents' feelings about one another determine to a large extent whether the atmosphere of their home is loving, trustworthy and secure. Their warmth and affection is important as is the way they manage differences and resolve conflict.
2. **Effective communication.** The parent-child relationship, so important for children's relationship with God, often stands or falls by the way they communicate with one another. Obviously good patterns are easier to establish when children are young - it gets a lot harder as they grow older. Nevertheless, it appears that teenagers still want to discuss difficulties and problems with their parents.
3. **Wise parental control.** Parents who exercise a democratic style value both independence and disciplined conformity in their children. They combine firmness with freedom, affirming their children's individual qualities and style, while setting standards for conduct.
4. **Parental affection.** Children whose parents are always emotionally available see their parents as trustworthy and themselves as worthwhile. One Australian study showed that "the nature and quality of the relationships between parents and their adolescents are of critical importance for an adolescent's adjustment and mature response to the Christian faith."
5. **Gospel-oriented parents.** As opposed to law-oriented parents, gospel-oriented parents actively value a spiritual dimension to their life, see God in
6. **Communication of moral values.** Caring parents are the primary influence in shaping the moral values of their children, such as caring for others, protecting the vulnerable, keeping promises and showing love and mercy. Parents do this in many ways, not least by the loving relationship they have with their children (which makes them more receptive to parental values) and by modelling their values in their actions, their use of time, their conversation and the commitments they make.
7. **Serving others.** Involvement in service activities when young has been found to be a good predictor of a strong faith, more than participation in activities such as Bible study or worship services. Opportunities for families to serve others together can also increase the amount of time spent together as a family.
8. **Sharing faith at home.** Research suggests that the sharing of faith at home virtually doubles the probability of children participating in the life of the parish. Even if parents feel that their efforts to share faith leave much to be desired, God's spirit seems to work through the efforts themselves. Seven home faith-sharing activities were found to be directly related to mature faith in children and youth. Read more in *Passing on the Faith* by Merton Strommen and Richard Hardel. Saint Mary's Press, 2000.



FURTHER RESOURCES

The Marriage and Family Life Project Office at the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is currently collaborating on the development of a Framework for Family Catechesis to assist schools and parishes to nourish family life at moments when families naturally come into contact with them.

Please contact Caroline Dollard for more information:

Caroline.Dollard@cbcew.org.uk

Also in development is a Catholic Certificate in Family Studies online programme for supporting volunteers in a range of family ministries such as parenting and marriage preparation. Please contact Elizabeth Davies for more information:

Elizabeth.Davies@cbcew.org.uk

Keep in touch with current events by signing up for a regular ebulletin. Please contact Hannah Moruzzi for more information:

Hannah.Moruzzi@cbcew.org.uk

Find out more about the effort of the Church to support families by visiting the bishops' dedicated website:

www.catholicfamily.org.uk