

Strategies for Helping Your Kids/Grandkids Become Catholic Super Heroes

Headline:

A child's faith trajectory is fairly established by the time they reach 14 years of age. Young adults are considered one of the most un-churched generations. The challenge is to help young people experience Catholicism as fulfilling their spiritual hunger. What can we do to help our children and grandchildren nurture and remain active in their faith.....in essence, to become Catholic Super Heros?

Objective:

Children tend to follow the faith of their parents. Roman Catholic families have traditionally had a passive approach to educating their children about the Catholic faith, delegating the responsibility of teaching our faith to others (teachers, schools, priests, nuns, etc.). As Fathers, we have a critical role in establishing the importance of faith in our families. Our children look to us for guidance. We have a narrow window of time to influence their beliefs and establish the faith as an important part of their lives. The powerful memories that we give our kids will sustain them and give them roots, when temptations of the world challenge them. Research has consistently shown that the chosen path of Faith by Adult Children is more impacted by Fathers than mothers (even very devout Mothers). As Leaders of our Families, Fathers must lead by the example of "living our Faith" and teaching our children/grandchildren the Truths revealed by Jesus in the Bible and in the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Song Suggestion: Faith of our Fathers

Bible and Catechism Readings

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Matthew 19:13-14

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people; but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

Catechism 2223

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery – the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones. Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them.

Catechism 2228

Parents' respect and affection are expressed by the care and attention they devote to bringing up their young children and providing for their physical and spiritual needs. As the children grow up, the same respect and devotion lead parents to educate them in the right use of their reason and freedom.

Saint:

St. Nicholas of Myra (Feast day - December 6th)- the best-known patron saint for children is the fourth century bishop [St. Nicholas of Myra](#) which is in modern day Turkey. Of course, today, he has been transformed into Santa Claus. The real saint was said to have been orphaned at an early age and received a substantial inheritance. He would be ordained a priest and later a bishop. Nicholas was known for his generosity and care for others.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

What type of spiritual example are you setting for your children?

Do you pray with your kids? (i.e., evening meal or bedtime) Do you look for opportunities to pray the Rosary with them? (i.e., on a routine basis like once a week or in the car on the way to a fun activity or after a death in the family or to thank God for something good in the family or when they are grounded or punished)

What events/things do you do with your kids to put faith in action?

Do you use the Bible and/or Catechism to teach the Catholic faith (i.e., about the Mass and the Holy Eucharist or about morality or current social issues, etc.)

Do you focus on unique Catholic teachings that separate us from other Christians? (i.e., the Holy Eucharist, the Mass, Sacrament of Reconciliation, moral teachings that are counter-cultural like marriage or contraception, the Virgin Mary, teachings on salvation, Sacred Tradition, Papal authority, the Saints, etc.)

Can you explain how Jesus founded the Catholic Church and all other Christian Churches were founded by another human being?

Action Plan:

1. Set a positive image and be your child's spiritual example.
2. Review the 8 strategies (see Resources below) with your wife and look for ways to be engaged with your kids regarding putting the faith in action.
3. Conversation starters about faith and religion you can use with your kids:
 - a. Do you understand the Church's teachings on the "Real Presence" of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and do you know what the Bible says about this Sacrament? How much of this is just accepting what Jesus says about the Holy Eucharist? Can you accept this teaching because "Jesus says so" or must this be proven scientifically before you can accept this teaching? Are there other things that you accept as true without scientific testing?
 - b. How and why do you pray? What kind of relationship do you have with God?
 - c. Why do you love Jesus?
 - d. What is sin and why is avoiding sin important? Can you name sins that are common in our society? Do the 10 commandments apply to today's world?
 - e. On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is going to Mass on Sunday for you? What makes it that number?
 - f. Have you ever had an experience where your faith was really tested?
 - g. Have you ever had an experience where your faith has really helped you?

- h. Who do you consider to be a genuine person of faith?
- i. What church teaching most confuses you?
- j. How is your faith different now from when you were younger?
- k. What experiences, places, or persons have really fostered your growth in faith?
- l.** Should we conform to what God has revealed through the Bible and His Church or should we pick and choose what we like best? Why?

Resources:

1. Strong Catholic Families, Strong Catholic Youth by Michael Thiesen (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry): <https://strobertchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Strong-Catholic-Family-Resource-Booklet.pdf>
2. "Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers", by Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, 2009
3. "Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults", by Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, 2009
4. <https://www.catholic.com/> : this is an excellent resource to answer Catholic questions and to find Biblical and Catechism references (i.e., great search engine)
5. "8 Strategies for Keeping Your Kids Catholic", by Robert McCarty, 2008 Liguori Publications (most of the pamphlet included below):
 - a. Practice and Participate: Contrary to popular opinion, the number 1 influence in the faith life of young people is the faith life of their parents. Young people really do mirror the faith life of their parents, so the way we practice our religion is very important. Our participation in Sunday Mass and other special liturgical celebrations, as well as our active involvement in the life of the parish, shows our children that our religion is a significant part of our lives. In addition to Mass attendance, we can participate in retreats, Bible study groups, church organizations and ministries, or adult catechesis sessions.

If you want your young adults to go to Mass, invite them to go with you – even if it's just on a special holy day or anniversary. They may decline, but your invitation will remind them that Mass is a meaningful part of your life and that you wish to share your faith with them.

- b. **Model Our Faith:** In addition to worshipping with our children, we can have a great impact on the faith of young people when our faith guides our daily routines and interactions. Faith should influence our lifestyle choices, use of time, how we handle conflicts, the relationships we form, and even how we handle work issues. It may sound trite, but the two most obvious challenges to the practice of faith in real life are how adults drive their cars and how they behave at sports events. Our spontaneous reactions in emotional situations can reveal to others whether our faith and values influence our behavior.

So we might ask ourselves: Do we pray at home in the evening? Before family meals? In restaurants? Do we remember people who are less fortunate in our prayers? Do we pray for our children's intentions? For their friends? Do we model forgiveness and reconciliation in our lives by admitting when we are wrong and forgiving others who hurt us? How do we handle crises such as death, divorce and illnesses? Does our faith impact how we celebrate Christmas, Easter, or other holy days? Do we volunteer our time and talent to any service organizations or civic programs? All of these situations are part of life. Our young people watch to see if faith makes sense to us, if faith works for us. They are looking for a faith that provides meaning in all areas of their life, not just on Sundays.

If you want your young adults to go to Mass on Sunday, model your Catholicism at all times and in all settings.

- c. **Include Young Adults:** What a blessing it would be if all our young people were greeted by name when they walked through the church doors! We begin to meet their hunger for connection by welcoming them on Sunday and fostering their participation in the faith community. A sense of belonging is a very strong bond.

These experiences begin with the parish young adult ministry program. Young adults need to gather with their peers right in their own church. They need opportunities to build community with their peers,

to feel connected with other faith-filled persons, and to interact with caring, believing adults. Parents should encourage their young adult's participation in appropriate parish activities. Parishes must be intentional in including young adults in their liturgical, pastoral, and leadership ministries. We can't wait until young people ask or volunteer: we must actively invite them into responsible participation in the life, work and mission of the faith community.

Of course, the experience of community goes beyond the local Church. Gathering with other young adults through national groups such as Theology on Tap or at diocesan or international events like World Youth Day will give them a sense of belonging to something bigger. One of the main benefits of these events is that participants connect with their peers from other regions and cultures. It helps bring home the truth that they are part of an important and inclusive global community.

If you want your young adults to go to Mass, help them experience their membership in the greater Catholic family. Encourage them to be involved in liturgical ministries and invite them to be leaders in parish programs.

- d. **Doing Faith:** One of the most important characteristics of the spirituality of young adults is their need to "do faith". Actions inspired by faith are powerful experiences. Perhaps the most profound experience of doing faith is involvement in justice and service projects. Serving in soup kitchens, participating in a work camp, working in a community shelter program or emergency outreach center, tutoring children, or participating in public events for justice can have a significant impact on the faith of young adults and respond to their hunger for justice.

Similarly, young people "do faith" when they participate in retreats, pilgrimages, or public Stations of the Cross. These can be moving experiences of faith in action, too. All of these experiences are even more powerful when young adults and their parents participate in events together.

If you want your young adults to go to Mass, encourage them to "do faith" through their participation in service to the community, in parish ministries and in special liturgical events.

- e. **Learning Opportunities:** Young adults do need to know the traditions, creed, teachings and stories of our faith community. They need to know the story of Jesus and the gospel message. Many are genuinely interested in reading and understanding Scripture. They need to know what it means to be Catholic, and they want to learn how to participate in the rituals and worship of the Church. The faith community needs to be a safe place where young adults can bring their questions and where they can search with others for answers that make sense, meet their needs and provide meaning and purpose in their lives.

Further, our young people need to know about that unique dimension of our faith often described as our Catholic "imagination". Catholics "see" the world differently. Through our sacramental lens, we encounter a world filled with God's presence. Our traditional practices, our use of images, our symbols, and our rituals provide an avenue to an encounter with an imminent, loving God.

If you want your young adults to go to Mass, find opportunities for them to learn more about their faith through Bible study, faith-sharing groups, or other diocesan programs-and offer to go with them!

- f. **Prayer Skills:** Young adults need both personal and communal experiences of prayer. They can be creative and enthusiastic when they are invited to compose original prayers or spiritual poems that incorporate their favorite music and symbols. Often they are very open to traditional contemplative Catholic approaches to prayer, such as the Ignatian exercises, which enable them to connect with Spirit within.

They should also be encouraged to participate with the faith community in worship experiences, sharing in the Catholic community's understanding of God, our traditions, our unique rituals and our ways of prayer. This "both/and" approach to the personal and communal dimension fosters their experience of prayer as the outpouring of their relationship with God and deepens their faith.

If you want your young adults to go to Mass, talk with them about personal prayer and the value of praying together at Mass.

- g. Faith Sharing:** As young adults search for a personal understanding of God, they must be able and encouraged to look for God's presence in their lived experiences. Young adults should be assisted in naming their experience of a God who is active and present in their lives. God does not wait to be invited into the lives of young people. God takes the initiative and is present, but God waits to be identified or named. Many young adults need language to help them understand and express their experiences of God.

Parents and other caring, faith-filled adults can assist young adults in identifying God's presence in their joys and sorrows, in their hopes and dreams and in their day-to-day lives. Of course, this requires that we have the language to name the presence of God in our own lives. We can ask our young adults where they experience God, where they pray best, where they feel joy and sorrow, for God is present there. And we can share our own experiences.

This faith sharing is a very important task because young people will never understand the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures until they can read the Scriptures of their own lives. Therein young adults experience the God who is always active and present. And we should be open to having our own understanding of God challenged and perhaps deepened by our young adults' experience of God.

If you want young adults to go to Mass, ask them questions about their faith life.

- h. Compelling Adventures:** At the heart of their spiritual hunger is the desire of young adults for a compelling vision of life that provides a genuine sense of meaning and purpose, a noble adventure worthy of their commitment. The Catholic Church inherited the noble adventure and compelling mission of Jesus Christ, to build the reign of God – to make the world better all people.

Participation in this spiritual adventure requires a community of companions also committed to this mission—that is, the Church. There is also a need to celebrate this adventure regularly—that is, at Mass. At its best, liturgy is a spiritual drama that tells the story of Jesus and connects that story with building the reign here and now.

If you want your young adult to go to Mass, call them to a compelling adventure worthy of their lives.

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