



Anxious About Your Child's Faith Life?

A Rationale for Family Formation 2023-2024

Saint Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Church

"I can't wait to get back to normal!" We have heard this in so many arenas over the last three years: school, work, sports and church. The pandemic had been so very hard on families in a myriad ways: losing childcare, juggling working at home and virtual schooling, being an essential worker and needing to leave for work, being cut off from extended family and support systems. Not to mention the stress of having loved ones sick and not being able to be with them or to have a loved one dying and not be able to be beside them as they walk to their heavenly home. We missed out on graduations, weddings, birthday celebrations and vacations. It was a crazy, unprecedented time indeed.

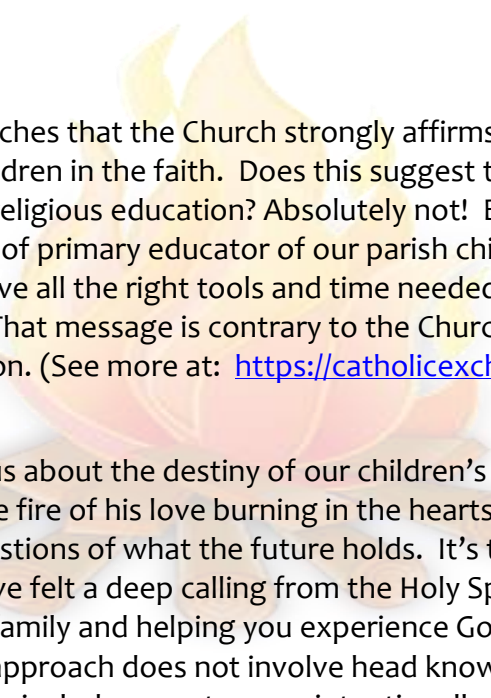
However, if one listens deeper, there were and are benefits that came from 'staying safe at home.' The pandemic brought along new and unique opportunities to reconnect with our nucleus family. More families started taking walks or bike rides together, family mealtime was resurrected, and time was spent doing new activities like puzzles or board games.

As our lives were stripped of outside commitments, we found more time to 'be' rather than to 'do.' For many of us, our lives moved from hectic to a calmer pace and we learned that our jobs could be done virtually and our family reclaimed the main focus of our life.

As an unprecedented religious formation year ended in 2021, we were very excited to receive many positive comments about the new family model of formation that we instituted due to pandemic guidelines. Comments like: "We were able to have real discussions about our faith. We learned new prayers together, and we were able to connect over the Scripture readings. I learned quite a bit along with my children."

These comments brought to our minds a statistic that was shared at a seminar we attended a few years ago. The seminar, presented by St. Mary's Press, was on why our young people are leaving the faith. ([Going, Going, Gone, The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics](#), Saint Mary's Press). We learned that the average age a child decides to stay or leave the faith is now around 12-13 years of age! We began to pay particular attention to what was happening in our own parish. We noticed changes in our own religious education program: Students are disengaged, parents are exhausted, and volunteer catechists are hard to come by. We asked ourselves, "Were students sticking around after Confirmation?" Sadly, a majority are not actively engaged in their Catholic faith after being confirmed.

This caused us to consider, "Are students learning enough in one hour a week to not only sustain, but grow their faith?" How can a child learn their faith in just 30 hours spread out over the course of a year (0.3% of their time)? That is like sending your child to school for one week each year! We also wondered, "Can parents be exploring & learning their faith alongside their child? How does this impact a child's maturing faith life? Would it increase the chances of our children choosing to remain lifelong Catholics?"



Our Catholic faith Tradition teaches that the Church strongly affirms parents as the primary and principal educators of their children in the faith. Does this suggest that the Church does not have important role to play in religious education? Absolutely not! But we neglect Church teaching if we assume the role of primary educator of our parish children in the faith, taking it away from the parents who have all the right tools and time needed to build the best faith community within the home. That message is contrary to the Church's explicit teaching about the nature of religious education. (See more at: <https://catholicexchange.com/faith-parents-best-teachers>)

It is quite natural to feel anxious about the destiny of our children's faith lives. We share in your prayers, asking God to keep the fire of his love burning in the hearts of our young parishioners, yet we still are troubled by questions of what the future holds. It's these questions that keep many of us up at night. We have felt a deep calling from the Holy Spirit to focus more of our faith formation efforts on the family and helping you experience God more naturally within the daily rhythm of your life. This approach does not involve head knowledge or tests to validate learning. Rather it is a chance to include parents more intentionally in the faith journey of their children. This is not meant to overwhelm you or place the burden entirely on your shoulders, but to help you prepare your children for a life-long journey with God. Your children will one day be navigating the world away from the closeness of home and your daily guidance. When confronted with the 'valleys' of life, we pray that your children will ascend safely. We desire for your children will be reasons of hope for others because their belief in God stands out as something pretty fantastic. Their formation is life-long and does not end in the eighth grade at Confirmation. In fact, it is just the beginning! Less than one percent of their year spent in religious education class is not enough to help our children navigate this large and diverse world as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The institution of the Church cannot compete with the daily love and learning that is experienced in the family. However, we are here to support you as we desire the same thing as you do for your children... That they are happy, healthy, and strongly rooted in the awesome life of God!

This year we continue to offer "a better than normal" faith formation model that happens in the context of the family. We understand that the transition from pre-COVID times has been difficult for some. Over the past three years, we have heard cries of "This was too hard with multiple children. I just couldn't find a consistent time to do this. My children need to hear about the faith from other faithful Catholics." With this in mind, we will offer more opportunities for students to be in person with their peers and volunteer catechists. While we stand firm in our efforts to focus on the family as the primary setting and launching pad for your children's life-long faith journey, we also work very hard to find better ways to support your strong efforts. We ask one thing of you! Whatever formation option you choose, make a promise to yourself to move your family closer to God in this year's journey. Our hope is that along the way you will also enkindle your own relationship with God and our Catholic faith.

We are grateful for your support and patience as we continue to navigate through this 'better than normal' year with you. Sleep peacefully knowing that together we will offer your children the best chance of God being the center of their lives in this life and into the next.

Thank you for your continued support and God bless you. *Mary Lou*