

Introduction

A Note to Parents

As a parent, you give your child countless good gifts: your love, your time, a home, a family, an education, food, clothing, and daily experiences of joy. The first and greatest of these gifts, of course, is your love.

Through your love for your child—through the sacrifices you make, the affection you show, and the discipline you enforce—you teach him what it means to be a human person: that we are called to live in relation with others, to give our lives away in love for others, and to use our minds and hearts to serve others.

You also, in all those ways, teach your child about God. The love you show your child is his first introduction to a God Who is Love. Likewise the care you provide for him is a living model of the care God provides for all His children.

Your Child's First and Greatest Teacher

Accordingly, because you are your child's first teacher in love, there is no one better equipped than you to be his first teacher in the Faith. More than any teacher, priest, or religious sister, you are uniquely suited to handing on to your child the most important lessons he needs to learn: who he is, why he was made, how he is to live, and for what he is eternally destined.

Indeed, the Catholic Church has made this clear again and again, noting in documents such as *Gravissimum Educationis* that parents are the primary educators of their children, the ones who bear the greatest responsibility in the moral, spiritual, and intellectual formation of their children.

Ever since your child was born and baptized into the Faith, you have been carrying out this duty in countless ways. From teaching him to share with others to taking him to Mass on Sundays, you have been forming his heart and mind in accordance with truth.

Now that your child has begun formal religious education, it might seem as if your role in his moral and spiritual formation has been supplanted, at least in part, by his teacher. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

A Tool for Teaching

Religious education is not like other subjects. That is mostly because it is not a subject. It is a way of understanding the world and living in it. Catholicism is a life, not a class, and therefore, the most important lessons cannot be mastered through lectures and memorization.

In order for your child truly to know and love his Catholic Faith, in order for him to become a good, kind, virtuous adult who knows and lives his life according to God's truth, he needs to see you live the Faith as well. He needs to learn about the Faith from you, and he needs to live it with you.

That means, of course, going to Sunday Mass with his family, but it also means talking with you about what he's learning, hearing stories about the way God has touched your life, and practicing the Faith in countless little ways as your family goes about your daily business.

That is the purpose of this *Family Guide*.

It is, on one level, a tool you can use to help your child review what he has learned in class. But it also provides you with quick, simple activities to reinforce those lessons at home. It provides opportunities for your child to expand upon and deepen his understanding of his lessons in the Faith. Above all, it gives you a reason, every week, to sit down and talk with your

child about the most important things in both your lives: your relationship with God and your relationships with others.

No one can form your child in truth and love better than you can. It is the hope of your child's school and the publishers of this handbook that the *Faith and Life Family Guide* will be an invaluable resource to you as you carry out this important work and grow in your own relationship with God.

How to Use This Book

Getting Started

Time and Setting

Each lesson has been designed to take no more than fifteen minutes, so it can easily be done in the evening, before or after dinner.

Where you choose to have this family lesson is up to you. It is helpful, however, to be in a quiet place, away from distractions and the television. This will make it possible for you to talk with minimal interruptions. It will be equally helpful to have nearby a symbol of your Catholic Faith, such as a crucifix, icon, or religious picture.

It is strongly suggested that you look over each lesson in this *Family Guide* before sitting down with your child, especially so that you may have ready any materials for which the session might call. You will also find reviewing the lesson and answering questions easier for you if you have already done the recommended reading from your child's textbook, the Bible, and the *Catechism*.

What You Will Need

To prepare yourself for the family lesson, as well as to conduct the actual sessions, you will need at minimum:

- A Catholic Bible, preferably the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition;
- A copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or access to an online version.

Several lessons call for a crucifix or an image of Christ crucified, as well as other small items common in most Catholic homes, such as a Nativity set, an image of the Virgin Mary, and a picture of the Holy Family. Although you can always find images online, you might want to consider purchasing these items if you do not already have them. Not only will they help you as you conduct these lesson review sessions, but they will also serve as a constant source of inspiration for your family in your home.

Conducting Review Sessions

In each lesson there are eight components:

1. Lesson Focus

This section is primarily for you, not your child. It provides a brief overview of what this week's unit has taught your child. It would be best if you read the entire chapter in your child's *Faith and Life* textbook before sitting down with him. That way, you will be more prepared to answer any questions he might have. When this is not possible, however, the Lesson Focus will serve as a brief introduction to the topics you will be covering.

2. References

Like the Lesson Focus, this section is for you. Set in a sidebar, it lists Scripture references and *Catechism* passages that directly address the topics covered. Reading these passages before the family session can increase or refresh your knowledge of the individual teachings, answer questions you might have about the lesson, and prepare you to address questions your child will likely have.

The Scripture references in this section follow standard abbreviations. If you are unfamiliar with the abbreviations used, you will find a list of the books of the Bible and the abbreviations for each either at the front or the back of your Bible. Each Scripture reference in the *Family Guide* directs you to a specific chapter and verse, separated by a colon. For example, if one of the Scripture references is taken from the Book of Genesis, chapter 3, verse 15, it will appear in the References section as Gen 3:15.

Similarly, the references to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are to paragraphs, not pages. This allows for consistency between different editions of the *Catechism* and makes it possible to search for specific passages online. So, if the *Catechism* references cited in the *Family Guide* are 323–40, you will need to read paragraphs 323 through 340. In the printed *Catechism*, paragraph numbers are clearly marked in bold print at the top left-hand corner of each paragraph.

3. Begin

Every lesson begins with a short prayer. It is important that you begin with prayer for several reasons. First, it helps you focus your attention, shifting it away from whatever you and your child were doing before the work at hand. Second, it reminds your child that this “homework” is different from other homework: it is sacred work. Finally, it welcomes God into the review session, allowing Him to be present and to guide you as you discuss Him and His teachings. It is recommended, but not required, that you use the simple and short Glory Be prayer. If you have another prayer you wish to use, by all means do so.

After you’ve prayed, it is suggested that you tell your child a short story or lead him in a simple discussion that serves as an introduction to the particular lesson being discussed. This personalizes the material and helps him see what the lessons he has learned in class have to do with the world outside of school. Again, the book offers a suggestion as to what that story or discussion might be, but if you have a different story that you would like to use, feel free to use it.

Finally, you will read a passage from Scripture that summarizes the core of the week’s lesson. You may read it aloud, your child may read it aloud, or you may take turns reading aloud if the passage is long.

If time allows, in addition to reading the Scripture passage, you might want to read the chapter from your child’s *Faith and Life* textbook aloud. Although this is not necessary, it will help your child to hear you “teaching” the material and serve as a good refresher for him.

4. Summarize

If your child takes only one thing away from the week’s lesson, this one-to-two-sentence summary should be it. It contains the essence, or the heart, of the week’s lesson. The *Family Guide* offers an example summary, but you may use your own. After concluding the Scripture reading, simply state the summary, and then move on.

5. Review

Much of the material in this section is drawn from the student textbook, but some questions cover a wider portion of the Church's Tradition, with the intention of deepening your child's knowledge of the lesson's subject matter. The answers to these questions are in italics. Ask your child the question, allow him to attempt an answer, and if he cannot give you one, let him know what the answer is. If he struggles with a particular answer, you might want to go over this section with him a second time, either later in the evening or the next morning before school.

6. Apply

The Catholic Faith is objective, meaning there are right and wrong answers about what the Church teaches. It also, however, is subjective, meaning that we all experience and live out those teachings in unique ways. Faith is personal because the heart of faith is a relationship with Christ. It is important that your child understands this. It is also important that he makes the connection between the objective answers to questions in the Review section and his own life. The questions in this section are designed to help him do that. Answers will vary because they are highly personal. Some answers will come easily to your child. For others, he will need your guidance. Feel free to give that guidance and talk with him more about individual answers.

7. Conclude

The session should end with a brief prayer. Concluding with prayer reminds your child of how special and different this review session with you is and helps him experience the act of talking to God, not just talking about God. Praying with you, his parent, is also important. Children learn how to do almost everything they do by imitating their mothers and fathers, and prayer is no exception. Finally, a concluding prayer offers an opportunity to thank God for giving you this time together and for revealing Himself to you in time, Scripture, and Tradition.

8. Follow up

For most children, the lessons learned in religion classes have little meaning unless they are matched by a lived experience of those lessons. Children need to see their parents, siblings, and trusted friends living the Faith, and they need to be given specific ways to do that themselves. These include prayer, worship, receiving the Sacraments, making small sacrifices, and doing good works for others.

Catholicism is rich with such opportunities. You have at your disposal a long and tested heritage of prayers, devotional practices, and history that can help your child live and understand his Faith.

This final section provides you with just a sliver of that heritage. Each week's lesson features three activities designed to reinforce the overarching lesson of that unit. The activities themselves are quite simple. Some take no more than a minute. Others involve a little more time, but not much planning. Some are prayers. Others are craft activities or research projects. Most can be done at home. You can do one activity each week, or you can do all three.

Although some activities are lesson specific, most have an application beyond the immediate material covered, and you should feel free to continue the activity even after the unit is over. For example, the week your child learns about angels, one of the suggested activities is to learn and pray the Prayer to My Guardian Angel (see Appendix). If you or your child discovers that it is meaningful and helpful for your family to pray this prayer every morning

throughout the year, you should continue to pray it. In fact, it is the Church's hope that you will incorporate certain prayers into your daily routine.

Likewise, you should feel free to come up with your own activities that reinforce the particular ends of each lesson. Again, you are the primary educator of your child. You know your child and your family best. This *Family Guide* is intended to be a resource for you as you form your child in faith and love, but it should not be seen as the final word on how you live your Faith in your home.

The early elementary school years are such an exciting time for children. Learning is almost always a joy and an adventure for them, and their ability to absorb and understand material is immense. Likewise, at this point in life, children have a natural sense of piety. Small acts of devotion such as lighting a candle in church or kissing a crucifix come easily to them, and even theological concepts that adults spend years pondering are accepted quickly by them.

That is why it is so important that you take advantage of these years, doing everything you can in your home to lay a solid foundation on which God can build. A lifetime of joy, peace, love, hope, and faith begins with learning the lessons these pages contain. They are the key to your child's happiness and well-being as an adult, and they are the key to your family's happiness and well-being right now.

Let this time of religious instruction for your child become an opportunity for your whole family to grow in your relationship with God. See it as a gift, not an obligation. You will be blessed for that now, and your child will be blessed by that for years to come.