

TEACHING THE CATHOLIC FAITH EFFECTIVELY

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1. RAISING A CATHOLIC FAMILY IN A SECULAR WORLD

My wife and I have four young children, so we have thought a lot about how best to pass on to them the riches of our Catholic faith, the most precious treasure we have to give them. Although we are just beginning to do this in our own family (our oldest is not yet four), we have had the good fortune to know many successful Catholic families. We have also learned from our own family backgrounds. My wife's family maintained its Catholic integrity through the storms following Vatican II, though there were some near-losses. My own family was destroyed during that turbulent period and each child fell from the faith at one time or another.

One of the greatest blessings brought about by Vatican II is the increasing realization that parents must be the primary evangelizers of their children. For our children to accept and be nourished by the teachings of the Church, we must be involved directly in teaching the faith to our children. We should read through the lessons in our children's religion books with them. That way we can grow in faith together with them. We can also make sure that their school or CCD program is presenting them with the full Catholic faith. Often religious textbooks have been reduced to a kind of religious psychology, focusing on how our children feel about their faith, rather than teaching them what it is. They also tend to avoid specifically Catholic doctrines like the Real Presence, Mary's intercessory power, and the truth of the Catholic Church. If this is the case, we must either switch religion programs or supplement their books with more complete Catechisms. Ignatius Press (San Francisco), Catholics United for the Faith (Steubenville, Ohio), and The Apostolate for Family Consecration (Bloomington, Ohio) offer excellent Catechetical series.

In our experience, successful Catholic parents do more than this. They know that to transmit their faith they must live it. The Catholic faith is not just an aspect of their lives, but their whole life. Today's secular culture, which teaches us from youth that devotion to God is a private matter, makes this difficult to see. Our society makes us ashamed not only to speak about God in the workplace or to our neighbors, we are even hesitant to show a vibrant faith to our own children. In fact, we often feel uncomfortable with our own religious desires. As a result, we rely too much on Sunday Mass and Catholic schools or CCD programs to teach our children. So to parents trying to pass on the Faith to their children, we suggest that most of all they try to incorporate the faith into their daily lives.

Of course, in order to evangelize our children, we must first develop our personal religious life. You can't give what you don't have. To do this, we must participate in the Sacraments as much as possible. Sanctification is first of all the work of the Father Who draws us to Himself. We open ourselves to His grace through frequent attendance at daily Mass and reception of Jesus in Holy Communion. Frequent Confession (weekly if possible) renews in us our good desires and gives us hope and strength. Secondly, we must begin to engage in one-on-one, meditative prayer with God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Mother Mary, our guardian angels, and other saints. Finally, we must nourish our faith by reading. We need to find good books about the faith, the spiritual life, the Church, the saints.

Let's trade in our Danielle Steele novels for works by Catholic authors like G. K. Chesterton, Willa Cather, Dietrich von Hildebrand and Peter Kreeft. Getting on the mailing lists of solid Catholic publishing houses like Ignatius Press, TAN Books in Rockford, Illinois, and Sophia Press in Massachusetts will open avenues to Catholic literature. Supplement secular newspapers with magazines like the *Catholic world Report* (Ignatius Press).

These practices will increase our understanding of our religion, gradually making it natural to think about God and make decisions from His viewpoint. We also want to extend this to our family life. Family prayer should have some part in every day. Mary's prayer, the Holy Rosary, has nourished generations of Catholics since it was given to St. Dominic in the thirteenth century. By singing we pray twice and learning to sing hymns can be a delight for the whole family. Preparing for the seasons of the Church like Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter by decorating the house will give us an opportunity to explain to our children (after we have learned it ourselves) each season's purpose. We can read Catholic books aloud to our children. The Daughters of St. Paul have an excellent series of saints' lives; many Catholic bookstores carry Fr. Lawrence Lovasik's books for younger children. These family activities are important and necessary, but there is no replacement for simply talking about God as situations arise. A family visit to the beach prompts me to say, "See how much God loves us? He made the ocean and these waves for us to enjoy!"

Family vacations can use a spiritual dimension like a visit to a shrine or beautiful church in an area. You might even consider participating in a Catholic family vacation, such as those offered by the Apostolate for Family Consecration or the Nazareth community in Comberemere, Ontario. many more ideas for developing a truly Catholic family life can be found in magazines devoted to Catholic life and culture such as the Nazareth Journal (Comberemere, Ontario).

Besides these positive efforts, families intent on being Catholic must try to minimize the overwhelming secular influences of our society. As I said above, our society is practically atheistic, that is, God is excluded from "real" life. Society claims to be tolerant of God, as long as He does not try to influence it in any way. If our children are immersed in this society, they will naturally consider their parents' faith in God to be abnormal, and we will have an uphill battle. A few simple but difficult moves will go far to decrease secular influences. First, cut down on television, especially broadcast television. Strictly limit and supervise both how much and what your children watch. Make use of your VCR to give your children quality entertainment. (CCC Productions) in Westlake Village, California, is a Catholic company that makes high quality, animated videos for children.) Second, and maybe more importantly, expose your children to many different kinds of music. Especially limit the amount of rock music to which they listen. Much rock music is not evil in itself, but the culture that has grown up around the music is not only secular but turns teenagers away from their parents. Moreover, better kinds of music exist (classical, folk, religious). Children who cannot appreciate these kinds of music have missed much that is beautiful in life. Finally, find and associate with other serious Catholic families. Contact with like-minded parents strengthens us, and the friends our children have in such families make our job as Catholic parents easier.

2. OUR CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

November 30, Feast of St. Andrew. We say the following prayer, which becomes part of the night prayers from Nov. 30 to Dec. 24.: Hail and blessed be the hour and the moment when the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin in Bethlehem at midnight in the piercing cold. In that hour vouchsafe, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my petitions through the merits of Jesus Christ and His most holy Mother.

First Sunday of Advent. Advent wreath: three purple candles and one rose candle OR three white candles, one rose candle, and a purple ribbon. If you have any kind of evergreens growing around the house, you can cut some from the back where it won't look bad.

Light one candle when you say your evening prayers. We always sing Advent songs afterwards, ending with "Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat, please put a penny in the old man's hat (our Dad's old army hat). If you haven't got a penny, a ha' penny will do; if you haven't got a ha' penny, then God bless you." We always tried to have some change in our pockets at Advent wreath time. By Christmas, we'd usually have a nice donation for the poor. (St. Vincent de Paul or church collection).

Advent Music Grailville Sings for starters. First week: "People look east, the time is near of the crowning of the year..." Second week: Repeat first verse and add: Birds, though they long have ceased to build/ Guard the nest that must be filled/ Even the hour when wings are frozen/ He for fledgling time has chosen./ People look east and sing today/ Love, the Bird, is on the way!" Third week: Repeat first and second verses and add: "Stars keep their watch when night is dim..." Fourth week: Sing first three verses and finish with: "Angels announce to man and beast..."

Advent Calendar. We have a big (about 30" X 40") burlap piece with houses made of felt attached. The doors and windows opened to show small pictures of Old Testament scenes. The final one is a stable and a star to be added just before Christmas.

The Jesse Tree is very much like an Advent Calendar. You need a branch that can look like a tree. It can be two or three feet tall. You cut out symbols of Old Testament characters or events and hang them on the tree. Some of the symbols are:

Chi Rho: the first letters for Christ. (Greek) Circle: represents eternity or God Who is the only eternal One. Triangle: (or any three-part figure) symbolizes the Triune God. Sun: of righteousness (Malachi 4:2). Star of David Tau cross: anticipatory, Old Testament. Salvation promised. (Isaiah 53:8,9) Anchor cross, Cross of hope: A cross rises out of the crescent moon, symbol for Mary. Sometimes called "Crux Dissimilata" because, like the fish symbol, it was used by the early Christians to conceal its true significance from the spies and informers. Fish: Sign of Jonah Coat of many colors (Joseph and his brothers) Root of Jesse: (ancestor of Jesus) Tablets of the Ten Commandments (Given to Moses) Bitten Apple: Adam and Eve

That's a start. You'll think of a lot more forerunners of Christ.

St. Nicholas Day, December 6. Santa Claus (another name for St. Nicholas, handed down to us from the Dutch children long ago) comes during the night of the Fifth and fills the stockings he finds laid out for him. He brings small gifts: mittens, crayons, candy, gum, small toys, tangerines, etc. He takes away the letters that have

been written to the Christ Child and brings them up to Heaven. Sometimes he finds that the children have left something for him and his reindeer. One time, before the sixth each year, I would make a single remark in everyone's hearing that we would be playing the Santa Claus game. Then I was free to play it to the hilt: "I think I hear sleigh bells out there," "Santa Claus won't come unless you get to sleep," etc. When they get older they know I never lied to them and they have fun still because we still play the game.

Mary Candle. On December 8, we set up the Mary Candle. Hollow out a part of the candle, just enough to hold the little figure of Baby Jesus. Wrap the netting around the base to conceal the Baby. The candle is unwrapped and lit on Christmas Eve.

Creche scene. Some time before the second Sunday, we put up the stable with sheep and shepherds. Mary and Joseph are somewhere at a distance, and are moved closer each of the next two Sundays.

The Christmas Tree. We bring the tree into the house and set it up a day or two before Christmas. We trim it on the 23rd and cakes are freely served. I must emphasize here: cakes are not liturgical but we've always served them and no one forgets it. The moral is: consider carefully what you are doing when you start your traditions because they are etched in cement! **IMPORTANT:** The lights on the Christmas tree are not plugged in until after Midnight. His was NOT a premature delivery. The youngest child puts the Baby in the manger and anyone named for John the Baptist (John, Jane, Jean, Jack, Joan) lights the tree. If no one has that distinction, I suppose the father does the honors. I've gotten ahead of myself here. We all go to Mass together, Midnight Mass or early morning Mass. When we get back home we line up in a room far from the living room (where the Christmas tree is). Each has a lighted candle and we sing Christmas carols as we walk through the house. The youngest carries the Baby to be placed in the manger. That is done when we get to the living room, or wherever the tree is. The tree is lit and then the Mary candle. Then we all kneel for the final Novena prayer. Each has a gift to give his Christ Child (Who, we hope, will be completely surprised, never having guessed who was his Advent Angel).

THERE ARE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS!

December 26, St. Stephen's Day. We play a game.

December 27, Feast of St. John. We always serve grape juice and drink the Love of St. John on that day. (According to tradition, St. John the Apostle was once presented by his enemies with a cup of poisoned wine intended to kill him. When the Apostle made the sign of the cross over the wine, however, the cup split in half and the poisoned wine was spilled.)

December 28, Holy Innocents. We always have a party with a lot of families and their children, all dressed in white, for innocence, and red, for blood. The required dessert was vanilla ice cream with strawberries.

December 29 - 30. Christmas carols wall to wall.

December 31. Children in bed early, awakened about 11:30 PM to a lovely adult-

type sophisticated buffet. It is a quiet party. At midnight we say the yearly offering (adapted from the morning offering) and the Our Father, then off to be.

New Year's Day. Later we have our yearly drawing and a turkey dinner. Each draws the name of a saint to have for a special friend for the year. Another drawing gives you a living person or family to pray for throughout the year. The third is a poor soul.

Epiphany. We bake cup cakes; four of them have buttons in them. They represent the three kings and Herod (the black button). If you are one of the Kings (wise men), you get a crown. Everyone hides, and Herod has to find them.

On this day, the father sprinkles holy water in this room and asks God's blessing on the room and on all who enter it. Over the front door he writes with chalk: + 1 C 9 M 9 B 4 + That is the year (1994) and C = Caspar; M = Melchior; B = Balthasar.

A Birthday Cake for Jesus

1. Make it round, like the never-ending circle, as is His love for all of us.
2. Make it chocolate, like the darkness our sins bring to us and others.
3. Make it covered with white frosting, like His purity covering our weaknesses.
4. Top it with a yellow star and put an angel, bearer of the first glad tidings.
5. Put twelve red candles on top, like the twelve months of the year that Christ is our light, add red for the blood He willingly shed for us.
6. Encircle this loving cake with evergreens, the symbol of everlasting life.

3. HOW I LEARNED DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

In our country, we used to have the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart and the blessing of the house on the same day. We made it something special. After the priest finished, he gave all the children attending the ceremony badges of the Sacred Heart, and he wrote the name of the family in his book.

On the feast day of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in June, we took the children to the Church for their consecration and they were registered in the book and got pictures, holy cards, and badges of the Sacred Heart

4. HOW WE TAUGHT THE FAITH

The following are some ideas my husband and I employed when our children were young:

- Screened TV programs they watched
- Supervised children's choice of friends and discouraged bad companions
- Taught them the catechism at home
- Said family rosary
- Insisted they attend Mass every week and on religious holidays (even

as

they became adults)

- Searched out churches while on vacation, so as not to miss Mass
- Encouraged vocal prayer and participation at Mass
- Gave children practical reasons for praying (i.e. special intentions)
- Inquired of children as to whether their actions constituted a "Christian" attitude
- Taught them Christian life by our example
- Made a point of having them watch religious programs with us at Christmas time and Easter
- Reminded children of true meaning of Christmas
- Created games that promoted real meaning of Christmas (e.g., making paper chain of good deeds; reenacting Christ's birth by putting on a Nativity play)
- Displayed Advent candle at dinner table
- Gave some religious articles as gifts for Communions, Confirmations, weddings, birthdays and Christmas
- Always said grace before meals
- Presence of religious articles in home (e.g., crucifix, holy pictures, Sacred Heart and Blessed Mother statues)
- Children witnessed parents' participation in attending novenas and parents becoming members of parish's pro-life committee
- Encouraged children to participate in some pro-life activities
- Children witnessed parents' reading a great deal of religious material
- Encouraged frequent Confession
- When topics, such as divorce and remarriage, pregnancy out of wedlock or abortion arose, vocally condemned these practices in presence of children.

My two daughters attended public grammar and high school because at the time, we couldn't afford to send them to a Catholic school. One of them is more religious than the other. My two sons attended Catholic grammar and high school. One is very religious. He attended Fenwick, which taught solid Catholic doctrine. The other son attended Fenwick for two years, then transferred to St. Joseph's High School, where the discipline was not nearly as strict as at Fenwick. He is a less fervent Catholic.

All my children attend weekend Mass. Both my daughters' spouses are lukewarm Catholics, but I think my daughters have convinced them of the importance of attending Mass regularly.

5. TEACHING DEVOTIONS IN OUR FAMILY

Some of the things that we have found to be helpful in fostering a love and devotion to Jesus Christ are:

1. Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in our home.

2. Divine mercy devotion. A major part of these is having the pictures in prominent places in our home.
3. Going to Mass on First Fridays and explaining to the children all the promises Jesus made to those who kept this devotion. This also includes having pictures of the Sacred Heart in the children's rooms.

Other devotions and practices that we have found that have led to a greater love of Jesus are:

1. Consecration of our family to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
2. Devotion to our Lady of Fatima. We were introduced to this devotion by some friends through the Apostolate for Family Consecration. Then some sisters at a church that we used to belong to gave us a Pilgrim Virgin Statue. What was so nice about it was that it was unbreakable. When we first got it I wouldn't let anybody touch it, but when I read the literature about it, I found out it was meant to be handled by children to foster devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. As soon as I told our children they could touch and hold the statue of Our Lady, she was smothered with hugs and kisses and has become a favorite statue in our home. We have made a home altar and the children adorn it with flowers, pictures, their favorite statues and rosaries. It has led to praying the family rosary every night. Sometimes we light candles and have pictures of the different mysteries. On special feasts we have a procession with each child who wants to carry a statue or picture and sing a song. The statue can be ordered through the Fatima Pilgrim Virgin Youth P Program of the World Apostolate of Fatima. (The Blue Army).
3. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament. We let the children get as close to the tabernacle as they can without disrupting anything and explain as much as we can about the sanctuary. We also light votive candles. We tell the children that they can offer up every Mass for their intentions. They especially like to know that they can save babies from being aborted. We have our own "equipment" to "play" Mass at home.
4. Use a missalette to go over the readings for the next day or Sunday. The children get a better understanding when they have heard it explained beforehand.
5. Have the house blessed. Keep holy water fonts near doorways low enough for the children to reach them. I try to bless them every night before they go to bed and when someone gets a scrape or bump.

6. TEACHING THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST

If you are raising a family today, the task which is set out before you is an enormous one. It is an undertaking that demands unflinching courage in a society where the climate towards God and towards families has become openly hostile.

What can families do who want to not only survive, but who want to thrive? What can they do to minimize the effect of all that is going on around them?

A Strong Family

Today there is an urgent need — a need to strengthen families from within. In order to give our children a deep and lasting impression, values must be handed down with greater influence and impact. A family must be far stronger than was previously necessary. To strengthen your family:

1. Rely first of all on God's grace to help you.
2. Have your priorities in line.
3. Persist in your effort to keep family life joyful.

Only when your family is strong will it have the necessary impact to reach the hearts of your children. And when you reach them, you can begin to teach them to love our Lord. To love Him by imitating Him, for love seeks to imitate the One Who is loved. To imitate Him in obedience and in the practice of Christian virtue.

Rely on God's Grace

Parents, be strong in your convictions. Be convinced that the first way to strengthen your family is to not rely on your own power, but on God's grace. For your family to live as good Catholics, your lives need to revolve around Jesus Christ, not just hoping He fits into your lifestyle somewhere.

Let prayer and the Sacraments be the center of your family life. Rely on those graces that God has promised in the Sacrament of Matrimony to guide your family and form your children. Ask for those special graces in prayer. We can pray for our children, and for God's help at Mass, which is the most sublime prayer. We can obtain God's help through Confession. Put the Sacraments and prayer at the center of your lives or else all the other things which you allow in the center will push them out. They are essential to receiving the strength and enlightenment we need to raise a family in the midst of a contradicting society.

You cannot hope to raise children well without God's help. You also cannot hope to leave the work to God and think He will take over if you ignore your responsibility. A prayer for God's help would be insincere if you were unwilling to put your best into it, using the gifts He has given you. Consider, parents, that you need to pray for your children while you do what is best for your family, rather than what might be most convenient.

When you pray at the end of the day are you grateful for your children, reminding yourself of little instances during the day when they have done something special or endearing? If there is a problem or task which needs your attention, use that time to prayerfully reflect on what God wants you to do, possibly even spelling it out on paper.

In parenting, there is always one way to go: getting better at it. When you sometimes fail or it seems that what you do is not getting through to your child, it's important not to be discouraged. But rather, place it all in God's hands when you have done what you can do. God can take all things, even our failures and mistakes and use

them for good and He also wants us to give Him our failures and mistakes.

HAVE YOUR PRIORITIES IN LINE

A Strong Marriage

If a family begins with a marriage, a strong family begins with a strong marriage. A marriage can only be strong if each spouse gives 150%. A good marriage is selfless and without sin, therefore no artificial contraception, nor even the desire to regulate children, unless there is a grave reason. The class my husband and I attended when we were first married on Natural Family Planning never mentioned anything about grave reason. Were we surprised when we heard of such a thing! It was the start of a whole new way of looking at bringing children into the world. Suddenly they were no longer something to try to avoid for a certain time, but rather they became the blessings, the gifts from God that they were meant to be. Gifts to be enjoyed and loved.

The marriage provides the initial example; it is the first teacher, and it sets the tone for what a child sees as normal life. Parents must have a happy (although not perfect) marriage. Let Our Lord fill the voids with His love. The closer they are to living the faith and God's Will, the happier they will be. have you ever seen a selfish person be happy? Or an angry person? It wouldn't make sense.

Your Time

In raising our children, we as parents must keep constant vigilance over our true priorities, that what momentarily seems important does not interfere. God comes first, then your family. Everything else comes after your family.

One of the best things you can do for your family is to give your children your time. Your time is so important to them, yet the number of temptations to occupy your time and keep you away from them is infinite. Are you trying to do too much, even too many good things? Are you often in a hurry? One way I notice when my family is being pulled in too many different directions is when we find ourselves constantly hounding the children with "C'mon, hurry up." If we find ourselves saying it even when we take them out for a walk, we know we've gone way over our limit.

Parents are often tempted to compromise what is best for the family for some worthwhile endeavor. Pressure to over-commit yourself in this or that cause, this or that organization, to socialize as much as others would like you to.

Sometimes other people have ideas of what they would like you to do. Great pressures can come from extended family: parents, in-laws, siblings, friends, relatives, or even just acquaintances. Their ideas may not be what is best for the family. Worse yet is when pressure is in direct contradiction to Faith and Morals. you might have someone who feels the number of children should be limited, or someone else who ridicules your family for the values you have placed on obedience, honesty, prayer, or going to Mass. Yes, you have to treat them with charity. But when you are making decisions, no matter who they are, do what is best for your children and their souls.

It is important to be firm in giving your family the priority it deserves. Otherwise

you will find yourself filling the wishes of others and your family will get whatever scraps of time are left over. You must be brutally honest with yourself in considering what is best for your family and what is too much and will take away peace.

It can be easy to overlook the needs of family members. They always seem to get whatever time is left over. The needs of others outside the family are looked to be met first. One takes time to listen to someone who needs someone to talk to. But it's at the expense of the spouse at home who needs that too. Or an organization that beckons and says you have so much to offer others and yet it is evident you have minimal contact with your children.

Do you have the "just until" disease? We are all prone to it in some form or another. You fill in the blank: "Just until I _____ then I will have the time I need for my family." For me it is painting the walls in our house. With eight children, a coat of pain does such wonders for the way things look. So once I begin painting, and see the difference, I get the three older children involved. Then we are really on a roll, and any spare time is spent painting. Which is great except there are still five younger children who need plenty of time and attention. And the problem with the "just until" disease is that when a project is finished, there is usually a new one to replace it. Another one of my weaknesses is organizing the house. I want to go, go, go like a bandit getting everything in order, so that when I'm done I'll have more time with the children. But all the while, I'm passing up that time with my children that I seek so much to have. It just doesn't make sense. The time with my children is so precious, and if I don't block time out for them first, something else is going to gobble it up before I get to it. I'm going to get stuck in a closet somewhere, and miss what's really important: being with my children.

For one person, it's fixing up the house that's taking their time, for another it's their job, or working toward a vacation. In pursuing "big pleasures," you miss the little treasures. When a family works so hard to take a fabulous one week vacation, they miss making teddy bears in the bread dough of daily life. In seeking comforts we miss the special moments.

That's how parents compromise. They relinquish the daily joys and responsibilities of raising the children for "joys" so fleeting and superficial.

What are we really concerned about? Is it "accomplishing" things? Or that others won't see our failings? When we spend time or work with our children, we might not appear to be much of a success. Raising children doesn't often give you the satisfaction of seeing immediate results from your efforts. Good and well meaning as these other projects may be, we must first be responsible to that first and grave responsibility to teach our children. And this takes time because it is more than book work, it is living it.

One opportunity we have to see where our priorities really lie, is when we are sick. What are the first things that get let go? Are they things for the family? While we still try to meet the commitments we have made outside the home? Are you saying, "Others are depending on me." "But what we have to do for the family is just the unimportant everyday stuff." We have this great responsibility and enormous opportunity to get our children's souls to heaven through the "everyday seemingly unimportant" tasks.

It is possible to spend a great deal of time together as a family, yet never be together. Dad reads the newspaper and doesn't want to be bothered; Mom's preparing food for guests and needs to concentrate; the children watch TV or play video games, and no one even recognizes the others' existence except for an occasional stumbling over one another. This doesn't mean "Don't stay home, everyone does their own thing anyhow." It means we need to use the time God has given us wisely.

The importance you give your family will show in how you act and think when you are alone with them. It can be so easy to let things bother us so that we become irritable and cross when we are with them. Even more so when we are alone with them and there's no one else to see our crabby behavior. Children, as perceptive as they are, can readily see either the double standard or real interest!

The time we as parents spend with our children is precious. It is always "quality" time because all the time is meaningful. The question is: are we willing to use it for good or let it go wasted? Are we willing to make the extra effort to include the child in what we're doing, to patiently work with or talk with the child? Or are we dead set on getting things done and bothered by the little interruptions which are actually the best opportunities for learning and don't always come when we are ready to take the time. We are setting the mold during those early years.

The Supernatural Perspective

Have you ever stopped to consider what an immense responsibility it is to provide for your family? But you do it gladly out of love. Many parents with great love are concerned with providing a college education for their children, looking to help them in the future. It is truly a prudent parent who looks to the child's future and prepares especially his future in eternity. Even more important than planning for college, we can not leave their eternal destiny up to chance, hoping they get to heaven, but taking no care to do anything about it. If they have all they need (or even want) but they lose their souls for all eternity due to our neglect, what have we done for them?

Parents might presume that since their child is a "good kid" they don't need to put time, interest, or effort into teaching their child to really know and practice the faith, with conviction. They don't realize that even honor roll students, star basketball players, popular students can lose their souls. In eternity, grades and baskets and popularity won't matter if it kept them from knowing and practicing their faith. Are you willing to hold back, to give only the minimum necessary when you are gambling with the eternal soul of your own child?

Catholic Education

You cannot hope to raise children with strong moral character if their education is filled with weakness and falsehood.

If someone else is doing the teaching, the parents have the ultimate responsibility for WHAT exactly and specifically is being taught and HOW. Just the obvious will tell you that the time in school — at least five hours a day (vs. a typical 20 minutes of direct communication with a parent) is time enough to be brainwashed. The decision of how your children will be schooled is a crucial one.

We need a stronger faith now than has been necessary. What boy or girl do you know who's faith is not under attack? They must know their faith. And they must be able to defend it even as children, or they run the risk of losing it. If they really know their Catholic Faith, they will be able to demonstrate that it is the only religion that makes sense, but **THEY HAVE TO KNOW THEIR CATHOLIC FAITH** to be able to do this. This requires the parents to know their faith too and, if necessary, to do the teaching themselves.

If you are considering a school, have you asked yourself these questions? Do you know the teacher(s)? Does he or she know their faith and know it well? And do they live it? Are they faithful to the Holy Father? To provide a solid Catholic education, the teachers must be profoundly Catholic. Do they dress in a way to be exemplary to so many children? What about the value they place on daily Mass. Is it even an option? Or is it so important that it is a required part of the day? Who would think to eliminate reading or math from the schedule or to make it a mere option? We know reading and math are too important to let the child make that decision. They go to school to learn what is important, not to make their own decisions about it. Children also learn what's important by what's required of them. So a teacher who does not want his or her class to go to Mass daily does not know the true value of the Mass or of our Lord's Real Presence. What importance does the teacher place on religious studies? There are teachers who consider Mass once a week a disruption of their schedule, so they eliminate religion that day. But if parents don't ask questions, they won't know. What about abortion? If a teacher says she is against abortion, but a mock election finds many of the students voting for candidates who are militantly in favor of abortion, there's something wrong.

Have you checked out the books that are used? The books and the teacher go hand in hand. An excellent Catholic teacher can fill any lesson with Catholicism and books that are true to Church teaching complement that. However, teachers who do not know the faith, or ignore their grave responsibility will ignore or not use the good books, or even teach error in their place. The books in all subjects should be Catholic. In the same way that you cannot practice the Catholic faith for one hour on Sunday, the Catholic faith cannot be squeezed into a one hour lesson. If we are going to live our faith 24 hours a day, we should know how it effects every subject, whether it is the courage of Christopher Columbus or moral teaching in science, our faith effects every part of our lives.

Rules and discipline in a school also teach what is held important enough to be a rule and how important the rule is by how it is carried out.

Lastly, but still importantly, look at those children who would be your child's friends. Could your children say, with Mark Twain, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." (He also wrote a book about St. Joan of Arc.)

The Option of Home Schooling

Some call it an option while others call it a necessity. Still others call it unthinkable. More and more families are seeing home school as a necessity. It puts parents back in control of their child's education. It can be thoroughly Catholic.

There are objections that keep some families from considering home schooling. One

is time. No matter how you look at it, an exceptional amount of time is required in your child's education. I know of one fine family whose children are in school. They spend more time driving and being vigilant about what their children are learning than most home schoolers do with all their schoolwork put together. The time it takes to unlearn any errors or bad habits, can be much more than what it takes to teach truth or good habits.

Another objection is that their household standards will drop. They are convinced that if they tried to home school, they would have to lower their standards. No more clean floors or clean laundry or a neat house. But again, I know a wonderful home schooling family with ten children. Their house is clean and neat; the children help to keep it that way.

A third objection is academic standards. Home schooled children can go to Harvard if parents invest enough into it.

The fact is that it can be done. You adjust; you learn; you readjust; you grow. Somehow, by the grace of God, it all works out. In time, God gives graces to overcome your past weaknesses in the areas of order, organization, patience, etc. If you see it as a necessity for your child's soul, leave the rest in God's hands.

Peace will permeate the home, that peace which comes from doing what is right, even though it may not be what is easiest, most pleasurable or most comfortable. Not the false tranquility of silent children who get their way or parents who avoid discipline to avoid contradiction.

A Home Full of Joy

One of the difficulties of the society we live in is that too rarely are we able to see or be with people who love to have and raise children. They consider it a privilege and do it with great enthusiasm and joy. Family life should be joyful, not sheer drudgery. If we are to make an impression and teach our children; if we hope to train them in virtue, it is joy that first prepares their hearts to be open.

But being joyful does not mean comfortable or without any difficulty. A joyful home is not selfish, disobedient, disorderly, prideful, envious or jealous. It is a home where charity and unselfishness abound; where there is no anger. Trust in God replaces tension because, with God's grace, things are not given more importance than they should have.

To be joyful in family life is so important. How you present things to your children can make the difference between making life challenging or making it a drudgery. Your cheerfulness also sends a message to them: I'm happy to be here with you and to do things with you. If being with your children and raising them to be exemplary followers of Christ is important and worthwhile, don't do it with mediocrity and lukewarmness.

Being cheerful can be difficult, when we are not feeling joyful. There are enough reasons to be sad or cross. This is true in all families. A parent's sad or angry mood sets the tone and atmosphere for everyone. What is needed is at least one member of the family who is strong enough to remain cheerful, peaceful and loving to lift up

the others.

There are people who are almost always so cheerful that others are refreshed by their conversation. What is different about these people? Not their freedom from trial. On the contrary, habitually cheerful people are selfless and do not spend time dwelling on their trials. If parents are like this, their children will be well-adjusted.

Building Character and Instilling Virtues

Several years ago, my family had the enjoyable experience of getting together with several other Catholic families to discuss various aspects of family life. I learned many things from these meetings, not all from the parents. A boy of about 11 years old smiled and greeted me directly with a handshake saying, "Hi, I'm Michael." This was a perfect example of good parental training.

Discipline and Obedience

The groundwork for obedience is laid very early in life. By aged five, a child's character will have been set. When a baby crawls toward an electrical outlet, a parent says "No." If the parent does not then act to stop the child, he is not following through and the baby begins the habit of disobedience. This action tells the child, "I love you enough to put aside my own comfort to keep you from habits which are damaging to your soul."

Here are some of our rules for training children to uphold God's and parent's rules:

1. Parents know the rules and spell them out to the children. For example, a task assigned should be done promptly, completely and cheerfully.
2. Children's mistakes should be appraised as either honest mistakes or blatant defiance. Honest mistakes are learning experiences; defiance deserves disciplinary measures.
3. Children should know the consequences for their misbehavior. Punishment is appropriate when they step over the line, but the type of punishment should be decided beforehand. Even a parent who dislikes spanking can be as effective if he remains in control and follows through with the punishment, even though he dislikes it. Belittling a child is not an effective way to eliminate poor behavior; it will rather make him feel worthless. Our ultimate aim, as parents, is to lead the child to God, not to straighten them out to please us.

Teaching and Training Young Apprentices

Let the Holy Family in Nazareth, where virtue reached perfection, be your example. There Jesus apprenticed under Joseph and learned the skills necessary to be a carpenter. He also learned how to work diligently and with order and promptness. Your children are apprentices in the workshop of life. The only difference between an apprenticeship in a trade and one in virtues is the concrete results. With virtue, the results are unseen by the eye; they come from within and parents are the key teachers of virtue.

Have concrete goals for your children: Prayer, piety, order, cleanliness, diligence, cheerfulness, promptness, kindness, patience, detachment from material goods, etc. You must be willing to work for these goals by your example and sacrifice, discipline and guidance.

Ask yourself: "Are my children obedient and respectful to me and others in authority?" "Do they obey promptly and completely to your requests?" "Do I treat my children with firmness and fairness but with dignity?"

Children need to know their faith well enough to defend it, especially in the modern world where there is so much opposition to the teaching Church. Parents should love to teach them the faith, as well as love teaching them everything else. Parental example is of prime importance. To say that we really believe in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion and not attend daily Mass would not make sense. Are you going to let anything come between you and your family and our Lord? Are you teaching the love of Jesus Christ?

7. SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS FOR CATECHISTS

I am a convert to the Catholic Church, so I did not have the benefit of Catholic teaching in my early years. My mother, however, attended a Protestant church and I was drawn to faith through a variety of Protestant groups and activities.

Protestants place strong emphasis on communicating the faith to young people and maintaining programs and activities from all ages into adult life, such as Bible study, prayer groups, music ministries, teaching responsibilities, evangelism, service to the needy, etc. They also recognize that the example of parents is the greatest teacher a child can have. But unfortunately, some parents become so involved in church activities that the needs of their families are neglected. This danger, of course, is present in any activity of the parents.

The following are some suggestions for religious programs and how to teach the faith to children. These are used by Protestants, but adaptable to any group.

I. Sunday School

A.Classes organized for every age group, from infant through adult.

B.Classes held every Sunday for one and a half hours including vacations and holidays. The messages of Christmas and Easter are emphasized. Leisure time should focus on Christ and His Church.

C.Pageants, plays and programs are presented for the entire congregation on special occasions such as Christmas, Easter and Mother's Day. Contributions by participants may include songs (especially "action songs" for young children, recitations (memorized Bible verses), poetry and pantomime.

D.Evangelism through Sunday School; children challenged to bring friends in "contests" for those who bring the most friends. Prizes include badges, stars, etc., and guests are officially welcomed and given some remembrance of their visit.

E.The need for foreign missions are taught Missionaries visit and discuss their work. They ask for prayers from the children.

F.Children use texts or workbooks at home so that parents might learn with their children.

G.Great emphasis is placed on Scripture (since it is their sole authority). Every child who can read is encouraged to own a Bible and bring it to church each week; Bibles are awarded for various achievements; Memorization and recitation of Scripture is emphasized, even at a young age; Games and exercises are often used to stimulate familiarity and interest in Scripture.

H.Music is a major part of classes and meetings. This includes songs of worship, praise, Christian life and experience and personal testimony. Choirs are organized for each age group. Composition is encouraged.

I.Tithing is encouraged, even for those who do not have much money.

J.Craft and creative work is taught ranging from cutouts and coloring for young children to written papers by older children

K.Birthdays are celebrated with songs and gifts.

L.Teaching aids are available such as slides and video and audio tapes, crafts and games.

II. Local Church (parish) groups apart from Sunday School.

A.Sunday evening youth groups for teens and adults include Bible studies, evangelism, guest speakers, social functions and group tours.

B.Weekday clubs for various age groups which are similar to Boy and Girl scouts, but with emphasis on learning and sharing the faith. These groups meet after school in homes or Church hall and are led by parents or special youth ministers where they do games, crafts, merit badges, practical skills, sports and field trips, but always Bible drills and memorization.

C.Musical groups and choirs are organized for different age groups. There are sometimes choir competitions between churches.

D.Vacation Bible schools are in session, usually for two weeks, during the summer. Evangelization is emphasized.

E.Confirmation classes held for children aged 10 - 15. Catechism is used and must be memorized and recited to teachers. The Pastor has questioning sessions before a group of parents as well as final exam.

F.Midweek prayer groups held weekly for adults. Pastor usually leads the group in Bible study.

G.Youth worship service; may take place at the same time as adult service, but in a separate place.

H.Youth ministers volunteer as sponsors for youth group.

III. Independent - interchurch youth activities for teens and young adults.

A.Campus ministries for junior high, high school, college and graduate students for denominational or non-denominational meet for fellowship to study scripture and to pray and establish like-minded friendships.

B.Coffee houses run by Christians where books and food are sold.

C.Correspondence courses usually centered around scripture.

D.Youth rallies with music, a speaker, testimonies and bonfire socials.

E.Young adult ministries provided by churches near universities.

F.Bible college and seminary open house days; evening classes for part-time students.

G.Tracts, booklets, pamphlets, books placed in strategic campus locations.

H.Youth magazines directed to specific age groups.

I.Summer camps.

The effectiveness of any of these ministries is related to the apostolic zeal and love reflected by the person who takes the leadership responsibility. God uses disciples and apostles whose hearts are set afire by His love. The content of Catholic teaching can be introduced into any of these forms. We Catholics certainly have cause and resources to far outshine the Protestants in zeal for the faith and love for souls. Our Lady, Queen of Catechists, pray for us!

8. CATECHETICAL PROGRAM FOR PARENTS

Since the Fall of 1993, a group of women, most of them mothers and grandmothers, have been getting together to study the Catholic Catechism. The meetings are held every fourth Sunday of the month. Currently, we have 17 to 19 women coming regularly every month. Some have brought their husbands to these classes. In addition, some of the women who speak Spanish in this group, are attending an afternoon of Recollection once a month. This is given by a priest of Opus Dei who gives the Sacrament of Penance in their native language. This Fall we are planning to begin catechetical classes for Hispanic children who attend public school.

9. THE HOME IS THE FIRST SCHOOL — THE FIRST CHURCH

Parents must be their children's first teachers. They must educate their children in the faith, prayer and all virtues.

Our vocation as Christians is to follow Christ. We must give good example and be true Christian role-models for their children. They must pray, work, plan and play with our children. We must also give them the gift of our time, which may be difficult in this modern society in which we must work and our children are left alone by themselves with no guidance or supervision. The consequences for the children are grave: drugs and alcohol, bad company, lies, stealing. This list is endless. Let us remember that the family that prays together stays together in unity, love, understanding and suffering and joy.

Where there is no family, there is no Church or school; there is no love, no joy and only troubles. We must imitate the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Model given us by God our Father Himself. Then the children will respect, love and obey their parents (who represent God), and our leaders and old people. The children also will love God, obey His laws and be fine Christians, full of faith and trust in Christ's family, the Church.

10. TEACHING THE FAITH WITH AUTHORITY

In the providence of God, each person is to be born to a mother and father, into a society of persons modelled on the Holy Trinity. The husband and wife, joined by the sacrament of Matrimony, receive special graces to love and care for every need of their child.

The most pressing need for every child is for God. Hence, he has the right to be taught to know, love and serve God. Parents are the primary teachers and God, as the most loving Father, provides special graces to assist them in fulfilling this sacred duty.

The duty of parents to transmit the faith to their child is so important that it cannot be delegated to anyone, neither priest nor religious sister. With all due respect for the faithful religious who wore themselves out teaching children, the strong Catholic school system of yore is gone. Gone forever is the day when parents could turn the religious formation of their children over to the religious sisters and rest easy. Today's parents will find, as their love for God and His Church grows, that the labor of forming their child into a fervent Catholic becomes easy and the burden light. To share the faith is a joy that no man can take from such parents.

Everyone is a believer; we are made to worship something. We communicate what we believe. Certain subjects tend to dominate our thoughts; those things to which our minds tend to return. The object of our attention is our 'god', of which we tend to speak. Whatever the child hears his parents speak becomes what the child thinks. We must be prudent in our speech so that we honor the God in whom we believe. Since no one can share what he does not possess, parents must cooperate with God's graces through diligent study and through the practice of their faith. Any Catholic who can read can find magisterial teaching. The correspondence course in Catholic catechetics used by Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity is one good choice. Written by Fr. John Hardon, SJ, it presents the Faith clearly so that one understands reasons for holding the faith he professes. Christian parents must trust God to assist them, confident that they are able to train their child to give reasons for the hope that is in Him.

To share faith in God means two things: to instruct the intellect in what is to be believed; and to form and inspire the will. Faith is the acceptance of the word of another, trusting that the person speaking knows the truth and is honest in telling that truth. Authoritative teaching is from God.

Second, the will must be inspired to love and obey God. A person who believes will be moved to share that faith with others. Everyone who believes has come to do so only because someone else who had the faith shared it with him. What those who teach need is authority, which is the basic motive of all faith. God bestowed divine authority by supernatural revelation. God is most directly and immediately the source of authority in teaching and governing the faithful who belong to the holy Roman Catholic Church. In teaching others the truths of the Faith, the teacher draws his authority from the Church which was given that authority by God Himself. For the Catholic who wishes to teach the truth, knowledge is not enough. To share the Faith with others, the teacher must love God as the object of that faith — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Only love can inspire, that is, "breathe in a faith so deep it must be shared.

11. HOW TO TEACH CHILDREN TO LOVE JESUS

1.They are taught best by our example. Take them to Mass daily from an impressionable age. They learn respect for (and adoration of) the Blessed Sacrament from others.

2.We make the intention to bind our children to the Immaculate Heart of Mary by praying the rosary. Mary will see to their souls and teach them to love Jesus. Pray for this intention.

3.Children learn about Jesus through the saints. Show the animated videos of Fatima, Lourdes and the saints. They will watch them over and over till it is part of them.

12. CHOICES TO BE MADE

Even before my pregnancy, my husband and I knew we wanted our child to know Jesus. From our son's birth, and as he continues to grow, we have taught him his prayers; we attend Mass frequently, pray the Rosary and read the Bible. These are tools that have helped him to grow strong in faith and help him to understand and worship Jesus.

But the everyday life of a Christian is a journey with many trials. Through these trials, we help our son to understand that there are always choices to be made. Through these choices, his faith is ever increased due to his love for Jesus.

13. TEACHING THE FAITH: OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

The education of children in their faith is a constant challenge today. The world hammers its values into our homes and lives through peers, friends, and all aspects of the media. As Catholic parents, we do our best to lead a strong faith life and to minimize the world's influence. The most important way to teach children their faith is for the parent to live it. We try hard, but often fall short. We try to go to daily Mass and to have a regularly scheduled prayer life. When children see their parents

put God first, they pay more attention to their words. Actions + words + works = belief.

The second most important way to teach the faith is to limit the world's control. We have severely limited TV viewing in our home during the past two years. The children mainly watch approved videos only. We don't watch TV or the news. (One child's nightmare after an explicit murder scene on the news taught us that!) The news is no longer rated "G", but often PG-13, with sex, drugs, violence and Hollywood gossip as normal viewing fare. We subscribe to certain moral magazines and newsletters for both ourselves and the children. We also have monitored trips to the library. Parents must put forth considerable effort today, but they can pass on their faith.

14. HOW TO GET CHILDREN TO LOVE JESUS

We promote prayer in our home by recitation of the Rosary, by attending Sunday Mass together, by prayer before meals and thanksgiving after meals and modesty in dress. We never use God's Name in vain. It is important, also, to teach respect for priests and sisters.

15. WHAT CHILDREN REMEMBER

What impressed me most from the past:

1. *The Baltimore Catechism*
2. Holy Cards with their little prayers
3. Learning the 10 Commandments
4. Memorizing certain prayers of the Mass
5. Religious prizes for selling raffle tickets

What I am doing now to promote faith in children: 1. Scapulars. I give them to St. Michael's Religious Education teacher for the First communicants and she has a special little service for them. They love it. 2. "Teen Creed" holy cards for 7th grade children when they are confirmed. We hope that this little creed will help them make decisions in life. 3. Good example

16. TEACHING MARIAN DEVOTION AND THE ROSARY

I home school two of my five children, Peter, age ten, and Robert, age eight. Three years ago, I began the school year with a seven year old who couldn't read, his five year old brother and six month old sister. For religion that year, I decided that the best thing I could do was to ground them in prayer. In addition to our meal prayers and evening prayers, we would pray the fifteen prayers revealed by our Lord to St. Bridget of Sweden (found in the *Pieta* prayerbook). We would usually do this while I nursed the baby. Since they knew the Our Father and Hail Mary, I would have each one pray one of those prayers and I would pray the prayer revealed to St. Bridget. After a few months, when I would stop anywhere during my prayer, they would pick it up for a phrase or a sentence or two. Then I would pray it again. By the end a year, they could say most of the 15 prayers.

I am so happy to share with you what God is doing with us this year. I purchased a set of three audio cassette tapes by Fr. Robert Fox, who is the director/spiritual

chaplain for the Fatima Family Apostolate in the U.S. On these tapes, he teaches many of the doctrines of the Catholic Church (sin, Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, Mary, Eucharist, Real Presence, Reconciliation, Vocations, Pope, Angels). He addresses himself to children and tells of his annual visits to Fatima and his visits with Sr. Lucia, friends and relatives of the three children and even clergy who tried to discern what was and is going on as a result of Mary's apparitions there. He suggests starting neighborhood cell groups for the children, to learn and to spread the Message of Fatima.

I have transcribed most of the tapes so that I could teach my children and seven others representing four families. (We invited six other children from three other families but their parents declined. That wasn't a waste though; some seeds were planted).

I decided to transcribe the tapes for two reasons. The first is that when I hear it and see it while typing, it helps me to learn it better. Also, knowing the children for some time, I was able to address them individually by name and to ask a question or draw a certain point by asking them to share their experience in a particular area. This allows for a more active role on their part as we discuss a lot of what I teach them. It has been so good!

At first, one mom came each time. Mostly, she listened and nudged one child or another to be quiet and pay attention. She has taken a more active part in sharing too. Now another mom comes too. I'm thrilled.

We have a snack and a prayer together to start. Then the teaching and/or activity time before we play together. The activity time may include drawing a picture of some aspect of what we studied, watching the movie about Fatima, or playing a game to reinforce what we've learned. For example, yesterday I divided them into three groups and gave each group a card with one of the following written on it: "Joyful," "Sorrowful," or "Glorious." Then I let each group choose a card from the 15 that I had turned down. On each of those 15 card was written one of the mysteries of the rosary. They would have to decide which kind of mystery it was: Joyful, Sorrowful or Glorious. If correct, they could place it under the proper heading. The group with the least cards wins.

Then I had printed and cut out the Scriptures that go to the *Scriptural Rosary*. I gave one group all of the Scriptures for the five Glorious mysteries; one group the Scriptures for the Joyful Mysteries and one group had the Sorrowful Mystery Scriptures. Each group had to lay out their cards from the previous game in this manner. They were to go through their 50 scriptures and decide which Scripture went with each Mystery. I had three copies of the book, *The Scriptural Rosary*, set around the room, equally distant from each group. They were allowed to look in the book under these conditions:

1. They had to go to the book.
2. Only one person from each group was allowed to go to the book at a time. They were allowed to take one piece of paper (one Scripture) with them. The first group to get all fifty correctly aligned under the appropriate mysteries was the winner.

I plan to have three buzzers set up. One person from each group will have his hand on a buzzer. I will read a Scripture and the first to press his (her) buzzer and correctly identify which mystery the Scripture goes with will receive a point.

17. RELIGIOUS MATERIALS FOR CHILDREN

I strongly recommend the Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon, Ohio and the Daughters of St. Paul for material to teach children.

When I was a child, I liked the holy cards with Saints; the nuns gave them to us. Maybe it was a reward for learning a prayer or because it was Christmas. I especially liked the small booklets on Saints in the pamphlet rack in church. I could hardly wait until the next one was put in there. Each colorful booklet had a short story of the life of a man or woman saint. I liked the little kit given to us before our First Communion. It contained a small white Mass prayerbook and a rosary which we took with us when we made our First Communion. I think it also had a scapular. I liked the religious pictures in our home. I really believe they affect children and grown-ups in some way.

My grandchildren like children's religious books and Jesus stories read to them. They are really interested. My grandson had been having nightmares for awhile and would no longer sleep in his bedroom. I told him to take the two books I had given to him (and read to him) about his guardian angel and angels and on Jesus' birth, to bed with him. It wasn't too long after that, that my son told me that my grandson wasn't having anymore nightmares and was staying in his own bed. This demonstrates the faith of little children and the importance of teaching them.

18. HOW TO TEACH CHILDREN TO LOVE JESUS

Take them to Rosary Marches and shrines. Mix family fun (such as the picnicking with grandchildren) with a religious outing. Teach them to kiss an image of Baby Jesus. Make a May Altar and have the May Crowning to help inspire and have visual signs of our love for God and Mary. Let them choose religious souvenirs, such as an angel on a key ring.

19. YOUNG PEOPLE AND PRAYER EXPERIENCE

In guiding young people on their prayer journey for the past 35 years, first my own children and then through Religious Education classes, I've come to learn that they need to create their own prayer experiences according to their individual age/faith level. Since I do not know where they are on their faith journey, I've learned to let the children — with a little guidance from me — create prayer services meaningful to themselves and to their peers. I never cease to be amazed at God's presence in "His little ones." Though less formal, my children's home experience follows basically the same "pattern" as that in the Religious Education classroom, which has been for me with second grade and teen youth ministry.

There is always a prayer table easily recognizable in the room on which are placed a Bible, candle and picture or something to signify the meaning of a season, feast, etc. The prayer space is made more personal by a picture or personal item representing each child (and me) at the table. This is decided upon at our first group meeting as

the youngsters design their prayer space. Giving a general guideline, I conduct the first prayer service which usually comes toward the end of our meeting time. At this point, we are relaxed and comfortable with each other, having shared thoughts and faith, we are now ready to share prayer, praise and petitions. Prayer and reflection is somewhat the same for all ages and proceeds in this manner: The candle is lit; a thought or theme is presented — for younger children the focus may be the lesson of the day; for older teens it may be the readings for the next Sunday Mass or an upcoming project. Then the individual creative portion of the service designed by leader(s) selected (or volunteered) the previous week. The theme may be reflected in song, dance, reading, instrument, etc. I am always willing to offer suggestions and guidance for the teens and review it before their presentation. I plan most of the second grade services, but always ask for suggestions and help. (songs, dances, readers, etc.) After a moment of quiet, the service ends with personal requests for prayer, thanksgivings, etc. and a sign of peace. This usually concludes our meeting time.

Along with this somewhat formal prayer, I like to remind them that we pray in everything we do all the time, and to be aware of this. I especially like to remind the teens that a car is a great place to talk to God when you're driving by yourself. It's good time alone — but not really alone.

20. WHOSE JOB IS IT?

Parents need to realize that it is their job to educate their children. Priests, CCD teachers and other teachers are there to help the parents, but the parents are in charge.

Celebrate Feast Days! Celebration is a very Catholic thing to do.

21. JOY IN WORSHIP

If children perceive that parents have joy in worshipping God they will want to join in.

22. RAISING A BIG, HAPPY CATHOLIC FAMILY

When we married 50 years ago, we decided to take one day at a time and try to do the Lord's will always. Life has not been easy but with the grace of God, we have been able to make it. With the Lord first in your life, and His Mother Mary always there for you, it is much easier.

Having been blessed with sixteen children, fifteen living, (one little angel waiting for us), life has been very busy. All the children attended Catholic schools and were always encouraged to do their very best. They were taught to love one another and care for others of all ages. It is only in giving that we receive.

PUT JESUS FIRST

They learned the value of a good home by working and by putting Jesus first in their lives. They have seen many changes in their lives and all continue to struggle with their families to live good lives.

Material things were never the goal to be reached. In their own way, they are all reaching out to help those in need, whether in the family or community. Many things have changed in our lives, Mary is calling but are we listening?

HELP ONE ANOTHER

In our church newspaper recently, there was a wonderful article entitled "Family, become what you are!" Children and youth: you have the right to expect love, guidance, discipline and respect from your parents and elders. And, in turn, you should obey and respect them while you share with them your love, your experience of God, your fears and hopes. You should help your parents and elders in their need and accompany them in the way of holiness. Pray for them as they do for you.

CHILDREN'S GREATEST NEED: GOOD PARENTS

Children should be treated as individuals because each one is different and has his or her own personality and needs. Your children should be your Top Priority. Showering your children with gifts and toys is not giving them what they really need. They need you! They need your time, your love, discipline, and your involvement in their lives. They shouldn't be running your lives by always running here and there.

EACH CHILD: A VERY SPECIAL BLESSING

Once a child is conceived, he or she is a very special blessing from God. Having this child is a lifetime commitment that shouldn't be taken lightly. Being a mother is a very special blessing from God, for you are always giving — just as Jesus did for His Church.

CHILDREN NEED THE ELDERLY

Running your children from one event to another and letting them hang around with children their own age is not what they need. They need to be with people of all ages, especially with the elderly, so they are not afraid of them. They can communicate with them and learn from them, especially in the story-telling.

PRIMARY UNIT: THE FAMILY

The family should be the primary unit sitting down to dinner together, reading stories together, praying together and doing things just as a family. Spending time together in front of the television is not family time. Television time should be supervised and limited.

23. EXPERIENCE OF A CONVERT

I was not a Catholic by birth, but somehow I'd always felt that I was missing something. I spent a great deal of time at our public library, reading about the various versions of Christianity, but I made no decision for some years.

I became interested in the Catholic Church in my senior year of college as a direct response to the good example of a roommate whom I admired very much. I attended the religious instruction classes, was baptized in April and confirmed a month later,

shortly before graduation. These classes were the only formal instruction I have received, but since I am an avid reader, I read everything about the Church that I could get my hands on. My husband, a "born Catholic," has also been very helpful to me. I also joined what was then called the Third Order of St. Francis. I feel that I am at least as well-informed as the average Catholic.

LOST GENERATION: THE PROBLEMS

I am very much concerned about the quality of religious education that our children have been receiving. I have just retired after teaching elementary school for 34 years. Every year, without exception, during that time, I found that Catholic children knew less about their religion than those of any other Christian persuasion. Most have not even known that the Child born on Christmas Day is the same Jesus who was crucified and rose again on Easter.

Our own children received practically no religious instruction, although we sent them to our parochial school as long as it was open. Doctrine was more or less ignored, and everything taught was all "sweetness and light," of the "God loves you so you should love everyone too" type. The same thing was true when we had to send them to public school and catechism. I found out later that the Catholic children of that period (1960's and 70's) are known as "the lost generation." We tried to set a good example for them and to teach them at home, but it wasn't enough. None of them even go to church today.

Our grandchildren don't seem to be faring much better. I'm afraid that they will be lost to the Church also. My husband told me that when he spoke to our Religious Education Director, she gave the impression that they new catechism will not be used in our parish. I, myself, can get no satisfaction from her as to what they are teaching. I don't know what we should do.

24. A STUDY IN CONTRASTS: MY OWN SOLID TRAINING IN THE FAITH

From my preschool years, I was taught by my parents, by word and example, the basics of my Faith: to have love and respect for our Lord, His Blessed Mother, and all the saints, to say my prayers, including the rosary, to attend Mass regularly, and to have a great devotion to the Sacred Heart.

I attended Catholic school from grades one through six. Grades seven through nine were spent in public school, but I regularly attended Catechism taught by the I.H.M. sisters. From about age 13 on, I thought it was wonderful to go to the Holy Name Society with my father. I went regularly until it was disbanded.

At the age of eighteen, I entered the Capuchin Monastery, where I learned a great deal more about our Faith. I stayed there two years and seven months. After leaving the monastery, I became a member of the Third Order of St. Francis/Secular.

When I was a child, I made my first Confession as a preparation for my first Communion, which still seems to me to be a logical and fitting way to do it. It emphasizes the importance of receiving the Holy Eucharist. At that time, before receiving Communion, children were expected to know basic Catholic doctrine and

all the traditional prayers.

NO SOLID TRAINING FOR CHILDREN

When our children were young, they attended our Catholic school briefly, because it was closed when our youngest was to begin second grade. They were instructed mainly by lay teachers. While attending public school, they attended catechism regularly. In both places, they were taught very little about the Church and little, if any, doctrine. In spite of our best efforts at home teaching, and trying to be good examples for them, none of them show any particular interest in the Church today. We feel that the Church let them down badly.

Our grandchildren also seem to be learning very little in catechism. While speaking to our Parish Religion Director, I received the impression that they will not be using the new catechism in the religion classes. I am very much concerned about this. I also feel that children should become more familiar with the Bible. Bible stories should be told in the preschool classes, and children old enough to read a children's Bible should be encouraged to do so.

25. BLESSINGS ON THE FAMILY

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus came very early in our lives. My mother was very devoted to Him. She believed that Christ should be the focal point in our lives. We regularly made the nine first Fridays and learned about St. Margaret Mary in Catholic schools.

With this devotion came the love of the rosary which brought the Hearts of Jesus and Mary together in our home. We prayed the rosary daily. Often friends who came to visit would kneel down and pray the rosary with us. My mother believed that those who were devoted to the Sacred Heart would have a happy death and she was right.

HOLY DEATHS

My mother died June 9, 1970, not long after receiving Holy Communion and Confession. She always was particular about her appearance. The morning she met her Lord, she had a bow in her hair. She looked like a little girl, so peaceful in death.

My father, who prayed each night on his knees, died in my arms on December 21, 1972. He too had received Communion within days. His death was so gentle that you didn't know when his soul left. He looked so peaceful that my children, who were present, have never been afraid to die.

My brother Tom died on May 4, 1993 in the presence of two priests and his family. On that morning, he was privileged to receive the last rites in his beloved Latin and a plenary indulgence. He was able to thank all of us as we knelt saying the rosary around his bed. Many of the nurses and doctors were impressed. They commented that something very special was happening as they came into his room.

EVERY HOME NEEDS THE SACRED HEART

I believe that my mother was right and that our devotion to the Sacred Heart has

been responsible for the holy and peaceful deaths of my parents and brother. I believe that a devotion to the Sacred Heart is a must in every home and that He will never let you down. We have the family picture of Him in our formal dining room for all to see.

26. SILENCE BEFORE OUR EUCHARISTIC LORD

It has become the fashion of our time to dismiss silence as an inability to "communicate," an unwanted introversion that is, in the least, an embarrassment to this generation of sound. Psychological orthodoxy brands it a defense mechanism, while New Ageism speaks of it as an appeal to one's true self. To the mass communication set, it is simply out of place with a world where everything must be spoken — and heard. The culture at large is numbed to a wordless moment.

SILENCE AS DEVOTION

There still remains the truth spoken by Christ, "I am the Bread of life," and the only response that remains capable of hearing it — silence. Attentive silence, motionless silence, silence in awe. This is called devotion. Devotion to the Bread of life is devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Silence before the Bread of life is called the way to opening prayer. The way to opening prayer is the expansion of the soul to grow in Christ.

EUCHARIST: THE HEALING REALITY

The Bread of life is the healing reality that the Church consecrates thousands of times each day throughout each baptized community of the world through the words of Christ's priests: "This is My Body which shall be given up for you." Before an unbelieving world immersed in sound, busy thinking of the next word to be spoken, Christ repeats His truth: "I am the Bread of life," and the noise of this generation only grows louder.

ADORATION FORTIFIES LIVING

But to those who hear these words of Christ, their hearing becomes the first step to the silence that fills the soul with peace. Such a soul longs for the time when it can anneal to Christ's message, and it does so in adoration. Before the Blessed Sacrament: each time it experiences a soundless harmony that makes new the day and gives to the person in adoration rest in every labor. From such experience adoration fortifies living.

HIS BLESSED PRESENCE

In the Eucharistic Crusade, that all have joined today, each and every person is called to a new sonority of life — one that is soundless, drawing each and every one to the Heart of Christ undivided. The Real Presence of a sustenance and nourishment that makes our prayer life whole, that activates a holiness of action that brings the message of that sustenance to a loud world: this is the witness of our Eucharistic Crusade. In the silence before His Blessed Presence in the Sacrament of His Body, we receive the serenity to quiet the world before His depths.

27. HOW TO RAISE STRONG CATHOLICS

Jesus said, "If you love me, obey my commands," and I believe that His Church says the same thing today. Love comes first, then obedience. Because of this, my main focus in teaching my five children has been to share the love which I have for God, for Mary, and for the Faith. I believe the maxim to be true, that Faith is easier caught than taught, especially in the case of young children who want to love what their parents love.

BEST EXAMPLE: PARENTS' OWN OBEDIENCE TO GOD

"If you love me, obey my commands." Parents' obedience to God's commands, especially His difficult commands, is how they demonstrate to their children that they really take God seriously, and that their love for Him is true. My children come running every time I call them, but I only call them for treats, I cannot say that I have obedient children. I can only say that my children obey when I call them for treats. So it is with God. A difficult or unpleasant command is the only true test of our obedience to God and therefore of our love for Him. Let the children see you obeying God when it is difficult or unpleasant. It will be an example of Faith that they will not soon forget.

OUR STANDARD: THE HOLY FAMILY

We also have a philosophy of the home and the family. We do not believe that the role of the family is to "toughen up" its younger members to prepare them for the real world. Rather, we believe that in the home, life should be lived as it should be lived. The standard is the Holy Family. The wonderful thing about such a high standard is that, even though we fall short of it, the children internalize it and measure all relationships by it. And when we do fall short and hurt one another, it's a teaching moment! We discuss how such behaviors are inconsistent with the standard and sometimes discuss relevant Bible stories. Then, we direct their eyes toward Heaven and long with them for our true home.

THE VALUE OF APOLOGETICS

As for the teaching of the Faith and Apologetics, we have ample opportunity. For one thing, our children, like most children, have "inquiring" minds concerning spiritual matters. We home-school with the Seton Home Study Program, an orthodox Catholic program. We know people of many different faiths — Lutheran, Jehovah's Witness, Anglican, New Agers, Jewish and many confused American Catholics. We explore the problems and untruths inherent in those beliefs, and as a family we pray for their conversion and try to convert them. I think it is very important for children to be alerted to the falsehoods in other religions. They must be made aware that there is a war going on and that they must guard their Faith as their most precious possession. Fortify them ahead of time so that when they meet these false religions later on, they will know them for what they are — false religions.

Apologetics will not only help them to identify the true religion from the false; it will also deepen their understanding of the true Faith. The way I see it is this: when you are taught the Faith, you learn the answers. When you are taught apologetics, you learn the questions. The answers always make more sense when you know the questions.

28. PASSING ON THE FAITH TO YOUR CHILDREN: SOME PRACTICAL POINTS

First and foremost, success in transmitting faith to children, or to anyone, is dependent upon the level of faith of those transmitting it. Parents need to be encouraged in their role as primary educators of their children, especially in the area of catechetics. In this day and age, parents are accustomed to allowing others to take over their responsibilities. No one can explain the Catholic Faith to children as well as their parents can — by living it, loving it and by being particularly zealous.

Don't be afraid to tell a two-year old or even a one-year-old that this is Jesus Whom mommy is receiving, and this is the same Jesus Who is on the cross. Never forget to mention the tremendous love He has for them.

The following is a list of ideas parents can use to pass on the Faith:

- 1.** Take children to daily Mass.
- 2.** Prepare them daily to attend Mass by familiarizing them with the readings before Mass and by explaining the different parts of the Mass and what they should be thinking.
- 3.** Assign each child his or her own missalette which they carry to each Mass. For the younger children, use paper clips to help them turn to the right pages quickly. Also, write in these missalettes phrases such as, "O Sacrament most holy, o Sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine," at the bottom of the consecration page. An alternative could be to write another prayer for the consecration. Even younger children could use a picture missal so they might follow along with the Mass.
- 4.** Read through the missalette with your children and explain the prayers and responses.
- 5.** Tell them how much Jesus loves them, especially when they try so hard to follow the Mass, and also how proud you are of them.
- 6.** Don't bring toys to church because they may think it's time to play.
- 7.** Be very firm but loving about the fact that this is Jesus' house and here we act differently than we do in any other place.
- 8.** Take children to weekly confession with you and speak with them about how refreshing it is.
- 9.** Encourage them to learn about the young saints who had devotion to the Eucharist, such as St. Tarcisius and others.
- 10.** Read, read, read to them about their Faith, especially about the saints. Our children love to have their father read to them about the saints in the evening. I firmly believe that this activity has played an extremely vital role in the development of our children's faith.

11. Family devotions are vital. Children need to see their parents pray, especially their father. An examination of conscience for children is an absolute for family unity and training. This time can be very joyous as we all strive to do better together.

12. Get good materials for your children. Our Lady of the Rosary, Ignatius Press and Catholic Book Company are some excellent materials.

13. Speak often about how Catholic Christian children should act. Our 7- year-old said to me this summer that his swimming teacher was not Catholic. I told him "That's too bad. Did she tell you that?" "No," he said, "She was wearing a swimsuit that showed her stomach, so she couldn't be Catholic."

14. Speak often about how unfortunate some of their friends are for not having the true Faith and how fortunate we are to have it. These can even be one-minute conversations.

15. Be aware of the liturgical year and talk to children about it. Emphasize special feast days and talk about what's coming up so they are ready.

16. Participate in May Crownings, Eucharistic Adoration, etc.

17. In a school or CCD setting, use what I'll term "reaction logs." They are written at the end of a lesson and children may write any questions or concerns they didn't want to ask in public. This gives the teacher an idea of what's on the minds of the students and provides an ongoing conversation which provides more opportunities to catechize. The teacher can respond to the student on paper.

18. Recognize that children need heroes and provide good ones for them. Talk about your heroes and explain that you are reaching for a higher level of sanctity. There are saintly heroes but also present-day heroes, such as Mother Teresa, Fr. Hardon, Pope John Paul II, or perhaps a pious aunt, uncle, friend or parish priest. Encourage these individuals to come to dinner so that your children may get to know them. Have them come to your CCD or Religion class.

19. Expect a lot of your children. Don't underestimate what they're capable of. They may surprise you. How is it that Maria Goretti, St. Bernadette, Dominic Savio, Tarcisus and others can have such a simple faith, but truly deep love of Our Lord while our teenagers today somehow haven't developed the capability to truly love Our Lord? I'm convinced that many parents don't believe they have that capability. I believe, after some years of working with children of all ages, especially teenagers, that given the knowledge, traditions and true heroes, that the piety of our young people could put us to shame.

29. FOLLOW THE LITURGICAL YEAR

We are a family of nine from Kalamazoo, Michigan. Here is a list of just a few ideas of the things we have done to teach the faith.

The best news is this: We, the Church, already have a plan, an outline, or table of contents for teaching children the faith and it has hardly been tried. We tried it in our family and it worked quite beautifully. It is this: Just follow the Liturgical Year.

- 1.** Enter marriage by living the liturgical year, so that when children arrive, they will be joining in this way of life with you.
- 2.** Pray together before and after meals.
- 3.** Pray together at night before a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary or a statue of Mary. Even the smallest children can hear and see, even though they are too young to recite prayers.
- 4.** Go to Mass together; discuss homilies at Sunday breakfast.
- 5.** Read Saint of the day and briefly discuss.
- 6.** Have crucifix in the home.
- 7.** Light a candle at meals, especially at supper, to represent Christ, our Guest.
- 8.** Become servers and readers at Mass; feel at home in and around church.
- 9.** Observe feast days, birthdays, baptisms, Confirmation, etc.
- 10.** Have holy water fonts along the route to bed or leaving the house.
- 11.** Have magazines in home such as Our Sunday Visitor and the many good books and reading materials available.
- 12.** Be happy, our religion is a joy.
- 13.** Say the Angelus. We have this picture over the piano. Children love this prayer because it reminds them every day of Christmas and the Incarnation.
- 14.** Make the sign of the cross upon waking in the morning. Say the morning offering while dressing and "Come Holy Spirit enlighten me" when leaving school.
- 15.** Devotion and prayer to guardian angel.
- 16.** Tablecloths in liturgical colors of red, white, purple, green, gold and pink, depending on the season or feast.
- 17.** The big feasts of Christmas, Halloween (Eve of All Saints), and

Easter have endless lessons and possibilities: months of preparation in Lent and Advent.

18. It helps to have a Christian marriage which is a covenant like Christ's covenant with His Church. Children feel good to know we will "be with them always." But this works even for one person alone, single parent homes and all kinds of families.

19. Children learn almost by osmosis if this is done, each absorbing what they can as they grow.

20. My husband's favorite song is "Earthen Vessels," which contains the phrase "One Treasure Only." We started calling out "OTO" to each other when saying goodbye or driving off to distant places. It has become our family's code letters for a final reminder: there is one treasure only — the Lord, the Christ, in us His earthen vessels. We sign off our letters to each other with this. Now I see this being passed along to the next generation. Faith is not difficult, but it takes a lifetime to practice. Thank God.

30. TEACHING CHILDREN CATECHISM

Catechism means a summary of the principles of a religion in the form of questions and answers. A parent must take every opportunity to "teach catechism" to their children. This is part of their vocation as a parent. But maybe many parents don't know their "catechism" and are therefore afraid to "teach catechism" themselves.

I recently experienced a spiritual rebirth in the Catholic Faith and I really wanted to learn my catechism. I had many questions that had never been answered in my childhood or young adulthood. Now, as an adult — and a parent — I began to search for these answers for myself. My children had been asking these same questions, so I was now able to answer them as I had wanted them to be answered for myself.

Teaching children catechism is not a formal class, although it can be, and many times it is. I think that every moment, every question, every situation is an opportunity to teach. I do like to use a very good "catechism book" that will give me a class situation to do formal teaching. Then I let the children ask questions. I help them answer the questions in their own way, but I make sure that they are answered correctly. This is where a good catechism book is necessary. Sacred Scripture is also very important in teaching as well as papal documents and the lives of the saints.

31. CHILDREN NEED QUIET PRAYER

The youth of today seem to have no direction. They are constantly being shifted from one desire to the next. Their world is a world of noise and constant movement. They have no real concept of quiet. The television set is usually blaring, the radio is on, and the telephone seems to be a permanent appendage to every ear. At a very early age, we condition our children to having noise all around them. Even adults seem to have problems with silence. Some believe they must listen to devotional tapes or have religious programs on constantly in order to attain a higher spirituality. They seem to fear silence. No one can truly devote themselves to anything until they

have shut the world and all its noise out. Silence is required for devotion. Devotion to the Sacred, especially in the Eucharist, requires a focused mind. A mind focused on God loves God, knows God is Love, and recognizes Love Incarnate in the Eucharist. Merely acting out practices of devotion is not devotion. At adoration of the Eucharist, much time is spent on reading and little time on adoring our Lord. By our actions we are saying that our reading is more important than Christ's presence. Is this the example we should be setting for our children? We must help children learn the value of silent reflection. It is a good idea to accustom young children to quiet prayer. A good exercise would be to have them spend a few minutes a day in silence. As they get older, it becomes easier for them to listen to and talk to our Lord. They begin to grow in their love of Him and to truly live a devoted life.

32. HOW TO LOVE THE SACRED HEART AS A FAMILY

I would like to suggest the following ways to bring children to the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with Jesus' help.

DAILY MASS

Take your children to daily Mass if at all possible, even at a great sacrifice on your part. Have their clothes ready the night before, and their shoes, which always seem to get lost, by their bedroom door. Teach them what the Mass is and how to be reverent at Mass.

ROSARY

Pray the daily rosary and consecrate all the children to the Blessed Mother. She will help you to bring them to the Sacred Heart.

LIVE THE FAITH

Give good example by your lives. Don't just teach and preach, but live the life you want them to live. Live this in your dealings with neighbors, clerks in stores, people you meet and deal with. Try to live as you think our Blessed Lord and our Lady would, even in trials and sufferings. Make the morning offering together on the way to Mass or before going off to work or school. Say the seven Glory Be's for the gifts of the Holy Spirit each day. Teach the children acts of love to the Sacred Heart, "O Sacred Heart of Jesus I love you, I place my trust in you, help me, guide me, I love you." Repeat this many, many times during the day.

HOLY HOURS

Make holy hours. Start with a monthly holy hour on First Friday. If the church does not stay open, try if possible to stay after Mass or go to Mass earlier on that day. Make the sacrifice, the reward is tremendous. Start night Adoration in your own home. Take one night a month, maybe a Saturday night; you can always go to a later Mass on Sunday. Give each member of the family an hour in the night. The younger members can take a Holy half hour early in the night starting at 9:00 p.m., the older members can take the middle of the night hours. Sacrifice yes, reward again from the Sacred Heart. "Treasure of Wisdom and Knowledge."

CELEBRATION

Enthroned the Sacred Heart as King of your family. Renew your consecration daily after the rosary. Have a family celebration cake and ice cream on the Feast of the Sacred Heart. Live your love and Devotion to the Sacred Heart always, your children will live theirs. Don't forget to thank Him for the grace to know Him, love Him and Serve Him.

33. THE BALTIMORE CATECHISM: A STAND-BY

WHAT MY PARENTS TAUGHT ME

My German father joined the Catholic Church one week before he married my Irish mother. That in itself was quite a confession of faith considering all of the centuries we were Lutherans and actively persecuted the Catholic Church. We all went to Mass on Sundays as a family together, but Dad didn't limit our religious life to Sunday Mass. I can still remember Dad lining my brother and me up for family attendance at Church on Ash Wednesdays and all holy days. My parents sent us to Catholic school and, thanks to the grace of God and the efforts of the good nuns who taught us our *Baltimore Catechism*, we have kept the faith till today.

WHAT I TAUGHT MY CHILDREN

Yet, faith is not something to be just kept and treasured. It is to be shared as well. As my life turned out, I ended up raising my two sons alone. I didn't just drop them off at the Church door. I went to Mass with them. We said our night prayers together, grace at meals and traveled through the *Baltimore Catechism* together, too. Both of my sons still practice the faith today.

MY CCD CLASS: ACTS OF LOVE FOR THE INFANT JESUS

I have a small Catechism class of twelve children that I teach in a very poor neighborhood here in Detroit. Have I still been buying *Baltimore Catechisms* to teach my class? You bet I do. I also teach them Catholic customs and traditions. I brought my own Nativity Scene from home and set it up in the classroom for the month of December. Of course, Jesus' crib is bare and I pass yellow strips of paper to the children and have them write on the slips what good deeds, prayers they said, and sacrifices they made that week for Jesus. They then fold the yellow slips of paper small and place them in Jesus' crib like straw, so that He will have a soft bed of their love to lay on when Our Lord comes to their Christmas party and His birthday party. The first year, Jesus was lying two inches up above His crib because of the little yellow slips of paper the children had made — so many acts of love for Him. I don't think that our Lord minded the height. Our pastor joins us for Jesus' Christmas birthday party. The children sing Christmas Carols and close their music with the song: "Happy Birthday" to Jesus. Father then cuts the cake for all of us to eat along with the other party treats. I really believe the parents of the students enjoy it as much as the children. It is another form of a Confession of Faith. Also, when I take my class to the confessional, I go to Confession too. We have to practice what we preach.

By the grace of God, I read about the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, where you can spiritually adopt seminarians studying at the Pontifical Seminaries around the world. I sent money each month to help pay for their keep and education. Last

Monday, August 15, 1994, both of my former seminarians, now both priests, arrived at my front door. The three of us hurried to my parish Church where they celebrated Mass with my pastor and associate pastor. As I watched them at the Altar of God changing bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, tears welled up in my eyes. These past twenty-five years of letters sent to and from India held many confessions of faith for us all, but to be able to be at their Mass and receive Jesus Christ from their hands was a blessing beyond my wildest dreams.

Time has passed and both of my sons finished Catholic school, went on to college and marriage. My youngest son became a father in May and now he is making his confession of faith to his three month old son, Francis, as he serves as a Lector in his parish. I'm not worried about young Francis being raised Catholic. With my son as his father and the wonderful Irish mother he has, I know that the confession of our Catholic Faith goes on through yet another generation. Praise be to God!

34. SOME DO'S AND DON'TS OF HOME CATECHESIS

Last week at Mass, 23 month-old Christopher said, "Watch mom, priest." After consecration he said, "Watch mom, Jesus." Each week, as I struggle to hold overweight Christopher, I wonder if it is worth bringing him. Christopher knows church is a place where one has to whisper. He knows that if he is good, I will reward him by taking him with me to the Communion rail. If not, when another family member is back, he must stay with him or her. Christopher folds his hands together all the way up to see Jesus. He says "Amen," and seems disappointed that he did not receive our Lord. So each week, I have a small piece of candy in my pocket and once away from others, I slide it into his mouth as I whisper, "This is sweet candy. Mommy has Jesus in her mouth who is sweeter than any candy."

At the six months, Christopher could clearly speak the word "Jesus." At seven months he could point upwards and say "Jesus up," when asked "where is Jesus' home?" Now Christopher has several sentences including the Hail Mary. Is Christopher gifted? No. Christopher has been taught, that's all.

Parents today spend hours sitting infants on their laps teaching them the alphabet, how to count, etc. They point out all types of zoo animals, colors, etc., but we don't speak to them of God with the same intensity, until the child is three or four years old. Shy? We have been convinced us that the subject of 'religion' is too advanced for a tiny child.

I have ten children and I would like to be able to pass on what I learned about home schooling to someone else — at any given time, I taught three to six children. If a parent wants to really teach religion, there are some things they should and should not do. Here is a brief list:

- 1.** When you pray, your children want to see if you really believe. I've noticed that often a child will stare at me when I pray. I know my children often wonder if I really see our Lord or our Lady. Let your children see how much you love God. Let them hear the words of the prayers as though our Lady or our Lord were truly in front of you. Show extra signs of reverence and bow your head each time you say, "Jesus." Children do not want to be told how to love God, they want to see it.

2. Children love to imitate their parents' ideals. Surround them with good Catholic families. The Bible says, "Even a child is known by his doings." Surround them with children who are just what you want your child to be.

3. Religion should not be boring. Use their religion books to teach them by playing a game. Write down questions on one set of cards and the answers on a second set. Lay all the question cards on the left and the answer cards on the right, in any order. Then have the child match questions and answers. I use different colored cards for each grade level so they can later be used for a younger child.

4. Children love to show off. They thrive on attention from their parents. They love being right, so during our family rosary, the children take turns saying something about each Mystery. They compete and also learn from each other.

5. Parents can't give to a child what they don't have. I go to Mass every other day, even though it is a hardship — I have a child with cerebral palsy who does not sit, stand or walk. I can't tell my children that the Eucharist is the most important event that takes place in a day while I just go to Mass on Sundays.

6. When I find an article on the Faith that I want the children to read, I take it into the bathroom. I never allow anything but religious magazines in the house, with the exception of the Reader's Digest. I fold back the page with the article so that it opens just to the right page. The children will often refer to the article later in a sentence that usually begins, "Bet you didn't know..." It works, but be discreet.

7. Finally, the car is a perfect place to teach a "captive audience." I "just happened" to have several religious tapes that I have "been meaning to listen to." They hear it whether they want to or not.

The proof of the quality with which the job was done is in the children's feed-back. One of my sons said, "Have you ever noticed Mom, how much better the food tastes once it is blessed?" My daughter stated, "We never went on vacations; we went on religious pilgrimages." I guess that doesn't really matter though, because God is everywhere and we pack our faith with our clothes when we go on vacation.

Home schooling works. Jesus was home-schooled. All of my children, except the child with cerebral palsy, are honor students. Isn't God great? He has given me many crosses, but for each cross, He has given me ten blessings.

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