

# Report on the “Family Faith Formation and Evangelization” Survey

NCCL Committee on Evangelization (May 2017)

In Winter 2017, the NCCL Committee Evangelization conduct a national survey on evangelization and faith formation with families to understand how parishes and schools are involved in the evangelization and faith formation of families and parents/grandparents. The survey focused on parish and school approaches to families, how they engaged families, and how they reached families at home. They survey concluded with an open-ended question about the challenges leaders faced in the evangelization and faith formation of families.

This report present the research findings from the 468 parishes and schools that responded. The respondents came from across the United States, representing over 400 zip codes. The report contains demographic information about the respondents, the findings from the faith formation and evangelization questions, and responses to open-ended questions (in the Appendix).

## Part 1. Insights from the Results of the “Family Faith Formation and Evangelization” Survey

### **1. Relationships between the parish and families are the most important strengths in the parishes’ approach to family faith formation and evangelization.**

- We express care with the families in our parish and community, including listening to them, showing interest in their lives, and investing in them. (Rating 4.01)
- We recognize the family as the epicenter of faith formation across the generations. (4.0)
- We provide support and advocacy when families really need it. (3.80)
- We share power with families, treating them as true partners by giving them voice in things that matter to them and collaborating with them to solve problems and reach goals. (3.52)

### **2. Parish efforts to reach families at home is the weakest aspect of the parishes’ approach to family faith formation and evangelization.**

- We find ways to reach families at home with support, resources, and activities to develop family life and grow in faith. (3.08)
- We equip parents with the knowledge and skills for effective parenting and forming faith in young people. (2.97)
- We strengthen families by helping them develop the practices and skills for healthy family life. (2.93)

**3. Sacramental programming is the most popular current practices, approaches, and programming in family faith formation and evangelization** including family-centered sacramental preparation programs for Eucharist, Reconciliation, Baptism, and Confirmation; and parent formation for Baptism and Eucharist.

**4. Almost 50% of all parishes offer family service programming and offer family (or intergenerational) learning programs on a regular basis.**

5. During sacramental preparation, approximately 37% of parishes engage in evangelization with parents who are uninvolved or not affiliated with church. Outside of sacrament preparation of children, less than 1 out of 6 parishes engage in evangelization with parents who are uninvolved or not affiliated with church.

6. Approximately 1/3 of all parishes have a website for families which has faith formation activities and parent resources.

7. The top five ways that parishes equip, support and resource families at home include:

1. We help families celebrate the church year seasons. (336 out of 469 parishes)
2. We help families pray as a family. (325)
3. We help families find ways to serve people in need. (315)
4. We help families celebrate rituals and milestones. (269)
5. We help parents talk about faith and the Catholic tradition with children/teens. (264)

8. Only 38 percent of parishes help families read the Bible as a family.

9. Only 1 out of 9 parishes use digital tools (like parent webinars) to reach parents and families at home.

10. Only 20 percent of parishes help parents develop effective parenting approaches and skills.

## Part 2. Demographic Information

Number of Respondents: 469

### Ages

20-30	21 (4%)
31-40	40 (9%)
41-50	83 (18%)
51-60	194 (41%)
61-70	103 (22%)
Over 70	28 (6%)

### Roles

Catechetical Director/DRE	332 (71%)
Pastor	8 (2%)
Parish Life Coordinator	9 (2%)
School Principal/Teacher	7 (2%)
Other Roles (youth ministry, children's ministry, family ministry, adult faith formation)	113 (24%)

### Parish Size

Under 750 households	143 (31%)
751-1500 households	154 (33%)

1501-2500 households	98 (21%)
Over 2500 households	74 (16%)

### Parish Location

Urban/City	129 (28%)
Suburban	178 (38%)
Small Town/Rural	162 (35%)

### Languages Spoken (all languages spoken)

English	468 (100%)
Spanish	232 (50%)
Filipino	104 (22%)
Vietnamese	55 (12%)
Korean	25 (5%)
Chinese	19 (4%)

(Additional languages: French, Burmese, Polish, Italian, Creole, Portuguese)

## Part 3. Faith Formation & Evangelization Results

### 1. Faith Formation in Your Parish

a) We have parish faith formation for young children (0-5).	312 (67%)
b) We have parish faith formation for older children (6-11).	465 (99%)
c) We have parish faith formation for young adolescents (middle school).	455 (97%)
d) We have parish faith formation for older adolescents (high school).	401 (86%)
e) We have parish faith formation for adults.	369 (79%)
f) We have a Catholic elementary school.	192 (41%)
g) We have families who homeschool their children for faith formation.	308 (66%)

### 2. Your Parish's Approach to Family Faith Formation and Evangelization

(Scale from 1 to 5: 1 = not a lot, 5 = a lot. Items are ranked from most important to least.)

1) We express care with the families in our parish and community, including listening to them, showing interest in their lives, and investing in them.	4.01
2) We recognize the family as the epicenter of faith formation across the generations.	4.00
3) We provide support and advocacy when families really need it.	3.80
4) We share power with families, treating them as true partners by giving them voice in things that matter to them and collaborating with them to solve problems and reach goals.	3.52
5) We offer regular gatherings of all our families for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.	3.38
6) We design ministries, projects, and activities that complement and reinforce the role of families in faith formation.	3.30
7) We engage families together with the whole community for learning, worship, service, relationship-building, and more throughout the year.	3.23
8) We engage parents as leaders and contributors in the congregation and in the community.	3.14

9) We find ways to reach families at home with support, resources, and activities to develop family life and grow in faith.	3.08
10) We equip parents with the knowledge and skills for effective parenting and forming faith in young people.	2.97
11) We strengthen families by helping them develop the practices and skills for healthy family life.	2.93

### 3. Your Parish's Current Practices, Approaches, and Programming in Family Faith Formation and Evangelization

(Respondents checked all that apply. Items are ranked from most responses to least with 469 the highest total possible.)

1) family-centered sacramental preparation program for Eucharist	387
2) family-centered sacramental preparation program for Reconciliation	379
3) family-centered sacramental preparation program for Baptism	301
4) parent evangelization/formation sessions as part of Baptism and Eucharist preparation	289
5) family-centered sacramental preparation program for Confirmation	263
6) family service projects (including parent-child, parent-teen)	209
7) family (or intergenerational) learning programs on a regular basis (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly)	208
8) evangelization with parents who are uninvolved or not affiliated with a church during their children's sacrament preparation	175
9) parish website for families with faith formation activities and parent resources	168
10) parent faith formation programs	167
11) family-centered (or intergenerational) vacation Bible school	129
12) workshops on family life or parenting themes	112
13) small group evangelization experiences for parents	109
14) family cluster or small group learning programs	105
15) family-centered (small group or large group) lectionary-based Scripture reflection	96
16) one-to-one parent coaching/mentoring	91
17) family retreat experiences	79
18) parenting workshops (skills, approaches)	74
19) evangelization with parents who are uninvolved or not affiliated with a church (outreach, programs, activities)	74
20) family retreats and/or camps	73
21) family Bible study programs and/or groups	69

### 4. Your School's Current Practices, Approaches, and Programming in Family Faith Formation and Evangelization

(Respondents checked all that apply. Items are ranked from most responses to least.)

1) family-centered sacramental preparation program for Eucharist	111
2) family-centered sacramental preparation program for Reconciliation	108
3) family-centered sacramental preparation program for Confirmation	71
4) family service projects (including parent-child, parent-teen)	69

5) school website for families with faith formation activities and parent resources	64
6) family learning programs on a regular basis	38
7) workshops on family life or parenting themes	35
8) parenting workshops (skills, approaches)	35
9) family-centered (or intergenerational) vacation Bible school	34
10) evangelization with parents who are uninvolved or not affiliated with a church during their children's sacrament preparation	28
11) parent faith formation programs	27
12) one-to-one parent coaching/mentoring	23
13) evangelization for parents who are uninvolved or not affiliated with a church (outreach, programs, activities)	20
14) parent evangelization/formation programs	17
15) family cluster or small group learning programs	16
16) small group evangelization experiences for parents	15
17) family retreat experiences	14
18) family-centered (small group or large group) lectionary-based Scripture reflection	12
19) family retreats and/or camps	11
20) family Bible study programs and/or groups	10

## 5. Current Approaches to Equip, Support, and Resource Families at Home

(Respondents checked all that apply. Items are ranked from most responses to least.)

1) We help families celebrate the church year seasons.	336
2) We help families pray as a family.	325
3) We help families find ways to serve people in need.	315
4) We help families celebrate rituals and milestones.	269
5) We help parents talk about faith and the Catholic tradition with children/teens.	264
6) We communicate with parents and families via regular e-newsletters or other formats.	251
7) We help parents support what children/teens are learning about their faith at church or school.	248
8) We help parents grow in faith as a parent.	247
9) We communicate and interact with parents and families on social media.	237
10) We help families with resources to bring Sunday worship into their daily lives.	234
11) We help families have family conversations.	201
12) We help parents provide moral instruction.	200
13) We help families read the Bible as a family.	178
14) We have a parish website for families with faith formation activities and parent resources.	154
15) We help parents develop effective parenting approaches and skills.	93
16) We use new digital tools (like parent webinars) to reach parents and families at home.	55

## **6. What Are Three or Four of the Biggest Challenges Your Parish Faces in the Evangelization and Faith Formation of Parents and Families**

More than 1200 individual responses were given to the “Challenges” question. The following list of 16 items reflect the items that surfaced repeatedly throughout the 1200+ responses. The numbering of items is only for reference. These items are not ranked in priority order. All of the items were mentioned dozens of times throughout the 1200+ responses.

### **Common Themes among the Responses to the Challenges Parishes Face**

1. Lack of interest in parents and families for religion, for faith formation, and for getting involved in parish life
2. Regular participation at Mass; going to Mass is not a priority for families
3. Lack of parental involvement in church life; getting parents and families to participate
4. Keeping families connected to church
5. Time: families are busy; time restrictions; over-scheduled; competition from sports and activities
6. Families choose other activities over parish faith formation and parish life
7. “Re-evangelization” of parents
8. Parents sharing faith at home; helping families share and practice faith at home
9. Parents lack of knowledge about the Catholic faith
10. Reaching unengaged parents and families
11. Creating more opportunities to engage families in faith formation, parish life, etc. (and finding the resources and leaders to do this)
12. Helping parish leaders and parents embrace a family approach to faith formation
13. Communication with parents; getting parents to “read” the communication
14. Meeting the needs of ethnic families; and addressing a variety of languages
15. Lack of staff and volunteers
16. No one on staff focused on parents and families

# Appendix

## Open-Ended Responses

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### 3. Your Parish's Current Practices, Approaches, and Programming in Family Faith Formation and Evangelization

#### Practices

1. We attempt to meet our families on an individual basis and assist them in providing for the faith formation of their children.
2. Strong Catholic Families Family Promise
3. Promote the family as the domestic church and provide activities to encourage this.

#### Programming/Activities

1. Family/whole community nights 1-2 x's per year
2. We have started the Gospel Players to put on plays from Scripture using the Gospel Players' Script Book: The Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles in Script. We have a one week Gospel Players' Summer Camp during the summer and we also put on a play during Advent.
3. Special needs family ministry
4. Young moms group Elizabeth ministry
5. Mandatory Family Catechetical Assemblies as part of Religious Education program. 4 throughout the year.
6. Regular retreats for families and ministry leaders Initiating Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in the Fall
7. Entire families participate in a 9 day service mission in Appalachia every summer. Very successful program. We join with the Methodist Church in town. ASP is life changing. We have 150 volunteers going this summer.
8. Parent/child outreach to homebound - delivering plants at Christmas and Easter
9. We do monthly meals for families (weekly during Lent), as well as coffee and donuts after our 10:15 Mass.
10. Parish Mentor Program for new families, MOMs Group for young moms.
11. Twice yearly family/intergenerational learning program
12. We currently offer a hybrid faith formation program for families with students in grades 6-8, We meet monthly at Church, parents attend adult learning/catechist training to share faith for the next three units. Young people attend faith group at the same time as parent meeting.
13. This year we embarked on a Family Formation program for families with children in grades K-6 utilizing materials from Family Formation based out of Ham Lake, MN.
14. Weekly lectionary-based 15 minute prayer services with children and their parents prior to RE class sessions
15. Activities at each grade level including families.
16. Special family events: Movie night, parties, brunches.
17. Family Advent Event Family Lent Event are designed to bring families together for catechesis and evangelization for the season to become more prayerful and meaningful in the domestic church.

18. We offer two Intergenerational Events each year through our Faith Formation Program. We have a comprehensive Resource Center for all ages with special areas focusing on 2nd Grade, K-6, adult, family, and teens. We offer Children's Liturgy of the Word during Mass.
19. RCIA children and youth (catechumens and parents) attends classes on Sunday.
20. For grades 1-5 we have Family Religious Education, once a month. Catechists work with the children and I, Sr. Bernadette work with the parents. We provide families with weekly Faith Formation lessons.
21. Family First Friday, coffee break with God , gospel reflection, bible study, date night, moms ministry, Summer family bible series , family vacation bible school
22. Day of Service which we call Caritas Day
23. We have over 100 adult volunteers in the faith formation program. Parents, guardians and grandparents are actively approached about participating in the program so that families are involved, everyone's talents are used, and the program reaches as many people across the parish as possible.
24. Personal mentoring with parents on the faith formation of their children. Developing family rituals, family prayer, family participation in the sacraments and in sacrament preparation.
25. We provide a family library that includes all types of resources for faith formation and marriage and parenting formation. It includes a free movie check out on saints, documentaries, as well as fictional movies with a moral value. We also have available all types of Catholic books, DVD's and CD's on parenting, marriage, self help, grief ministry, homosexuality, etc. that are available for free check out. A lot of families make use of these resources.
26. Parent faith formation as part of Confirmation preparation
27. Monthly Family Mass Monthly Youth Mass

### **Communication**

1. Communicate with parents via monthly newsletter.
2. Weekly newsletter reinforcing the lectionary based catechesis and providing resources to encourage parents in their own faith formation.
3. Monthly newsletter sent home via emails of families enrolled in the faith formation programs. Links to different sites to help families grown in faith Send home make up using lectionary based material if absent from the program
4. Family newsletters to engage all parents, but especially those who may bring their children to Faith Formation classes, but do not participate in Mass.
5. Parent newsletter
6. Providing information regarding confidential issues parents are dealing with their child. Listening.
7. Bulletin inserts and physical handouts

## 5. Current Approaches to Equip, Support, and Resource Families at Home

1. Advent and Lenten Resources
2. We are working on a new web site now that will offer bilingual resources for parents re activities they can do at home or links to offer more information. We also offer activities and information in our bulletin on occasion. We reach out to parents via our Facebook page and offer creative and/or inspirational messages in addition to program specific details.
3. We send resources (videos, articles, links, etc.) to each household on our monthly topic
4. We offer resources to parents who want to do faith formation at home.
5. Family retreats
6. Providing prayer to do at home daily inviting them to celebrate at liturgical seasons
7. We have a subscription to formed.org and promote it through our family program
8. Priest gives gifts of books for families that contain information for family faith.
9. Family Resource Binder which includes information, activities, prayers, etc. with regards to the sacraments, the Liturgical Calendar and special holidays. Our Resource Center makes available to parents, books about parenting, ideas for celebrating the Catholic Faith with kids and promoting daily ritual.
10. We use the Sunday bulletin to instruct and inform parents and families about topics of interest in the diocese.
11. We have our own OLOS app and we utilize the remind app to connect in a non-intrusive way with our families.
12. Letters and resource information given to parents on a regular basis.
13. We send a book home with the family for home study.
14. Take-home activities, prayers, rituals, service project ideas, and conversation questions to complement children's Sunday faith formation
15. We send weekly grade appropriate materials home to families so parents and care givers know what their child learned at religious education that Sunday; Advent and nativity play with children's choir -high participation; receptions; We Care for You series—monthly seminars that parents and parishioners can attend; newsletters.
16. Listening to them. Praying with and for them. Being present with them through illness, job loss, elder care, separation, divorce, disasters, etc. Being readily available by text and phone, accommodating the situation of their student, their family. Our folks don't need too much tech, they need to feel connected with their church. Sometimes I am the only connection they can go to.
17. We utilize the parish app to reach families.
18. Every family in our faith formation program commits to home study and enrichment as part of our formal program through our Household of Faith agreement.
19. We have an area that we keep catechetical resources available to parents and students to take home with them and do at home. This includes coloring sheets with liturgical themes, craft activities, latest Catholic books, holy cards, prayers, rosaries, children activity placemats, novenas etc.