



Partnering with Parents in Youth Ministry



“Go And Make Disciples...” Mt.28:19

The Great Commissioning:

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” [Matthew 28:16-20](#)

The great commission that Jesus gave to His disciples is the great commission of the church, our mission statement, and the reason we exist, to go and make disciples. Each one of us, whether our ministry focus is on children or youth, has a responsibility to the faith and spiritual development of the whole family. More importantly, within the context of family, we have a deep responsibility to parents. To coin a phrase from the decades old initiative from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, our responsibility is to build “Strong Catholic Youth, (and) Strong Catholic Families”.

The family is a key component in God’s plan for creation, the source of community life, and the witness of life in Christ to the world. Pope Saint John Paul II once said, “the future of humanity passes by way of the family”, and the family is “a domestic church, a little church”. In God’s plan, parents are the head of the domestic church and as such, parents have the greatest influence over their children. They are a living catechesis, modeling the faith in every aspect of life. A parent’s commitment to the faith and the church speaks volumes over any faith formation or youth ministry program. In it’s right order, the Universal Church thrives and grows when first the domestic church thrives and grows.

When we invest in parents, faithful households and healthy families; catechesis and youth ministry becomes a partnership in the Churches mission of evangelization.



The Focus is the Family

“The family is a proclamation of faith in that it is the natural place in which faith can be lived in a simple and spontaneous manner”.

Directory for Catechesis #227

The new Directory for Catechesis which arrived silently in 2020 amid the COVID-19 outbreak, beautifully reminds us that **the primary focus of all catechetical and youth ministry programs should be on the health and spiritual development of the entire family, most especially the parents.** In the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus teaches us the parable of the Sower and the Seed. For years parish catechetical leaders, youth ministers and catechists have used this passage to rationalize disengagement, “Remember, we’re just sowing seeds, its up to God to till the soil.” But the problem is, we’ve got the story backwards. We are planting seeds before tilling the soil, and Jesus warns us about that. Jesus tells us that the seed that falls on good or fertile ground bears much fruit. That’s right, the ground that has been tilled and properly prepared (Belong = Evangelization), receives the seed well (Believe = Catechesis) and it bears much fruit (Become = Conversion). For us, the soil is our heart. For young people their heart (soil) lies in the family (field) that is in much need of tillage (Evangelization). If our ministries focus solely on young people, chances are the seeds we plant will fall on rocky ground and be scorched. God put us here to till the soil and then plant seeds. Together, let us go boldly out into that beautiful field of family life and start building trusted partnerships that lead to the evangelization, formation and conversion of families and a renewed growth of the church.



Parents Are Not The Enemy

“Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children”.

CCC #2223

This opening sentence in the Catechism of the Catholic Church has been used to convict disconnected parents and vindicate failing faith formation and youth ministry programs for decades. For far too long parishes and parents have been disconnected and confused about the role each other plays in the formative lives of children and youth. Think about this for a moment, if we hold fast to the idea that parents are the first and primary formators of the faith, then why do the majority of our faith formation programs ask parents to “drop off” their children to the parish experts for formation and then offer nothing to parents outside of an occasional catechesis class or parent handout. We have unwittingly demonized parents in their own disaffiliation and have allowed the school model of formation to separate us from families and to separate parents from children. Sadly, in this separation we have unconsciously become afraid to talk to parents, and we often see them as the enemy of a successful formation program.

It bears repeating that parents are not the enemy. Rather, we may be our own enemy. You see, the opening sentence in the catechism (above) is true and is echoed in the Rite of Baptism and in the directories for catechesis. But the problem is, it is just the first sentence. When we read on further we discover that we, the catechetical leaders, have a deeper role in the spiritual and faith development of parents. Parents in many cases are the second generation of the disaffiliated, so, in the process of conversion then, require the same measure of attention that their children do. Parents need accompaniment toward a life lived in truth, they need support and to know that the church is there for them, and most of all they need their own spiritual and faith development that begins in evangelization and the kerygma.

“Thanks to the family, the Church becomes a family of families and is enriched with the life of these domestic churches.” *Directory for Catechesis #226*

“Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for an effort at evangelization and catechesis inside the family.”

“The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfillment of their educational mission”

Directory for Catechesis #124

The Need For Accompaniment

“Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.”
Luke 24:13-35

Jesus is the Model Teacher: The Gospels show us how Jesus communicated the Good News. In the familiar story of Emmaus, we find the model for this pastoral plan (the accompaniment of adults). Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us #7

On the road to Emmaus, the disciples were walking away from the resurrection. In essence, they were walking in the wrong direction! They were confused, scared, sad, lost and searching, and because of all of these distractions of experiences and emotions, they were blind to the truth, a truth which was standing right in front of them. Our parents and their children are no different than the disciples on that road to Emmaus and that is the reason the Church has chosen this Gospel as the model for formation today. Those to whom we minister are overcome by the trappings of the world and have been blinded. They cannot see the Messiah that has been with them since the beginning, who is standing right in front of them. It is not because they don't want to see Him, it is because they have been surrounded by the world and its false narrative, causing temporary blindness and a false sense of happiness and fulfillment.

The Gospel story of Emmaus goes on to tell us that when Jesus accompanied the disciples on the road that day, he walked with them - in the wrong direction! Jesus befriended them, listened to them, asked questions, and shared deeply the scriptures with them. He built up within them a *trust* and *curiosity* that led to their *openness* to invite him to stay with them because they *desired* more. Jesus concludes by sharing a meal with them and in the breaking of the bread (Eucharist) their eyes were opened, they recognized Him and he disappeared. The disciples immediately recognized that their hearts were “burning” within them and they ran back (in the right direction) toward the resurrection and told the others what they had seen. They were the first missionary disciples. Jesus accompanies us and asks us to do the same.



How Do We Accompany?

“Although it sounds obvious, Spiritual Accompaniment must lead others even closer to God, in whom we attain true freedom.”

“The Church will have to initiate everyone, priests, religious, and laity into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other.”
Evangelii Gaudium #169

The Diocese of Palm Beach has a vision for accompaniment and discipleship ministry that has drawn from more than two decades of personal experience and the works of ecclesial and lay sources and experts. One such expert, Sherry Waddell, author of *Forming Intentional Disciples*, lays out an easy to understand method for accompanying individuals toward conversion and discipleship. We believe parents need to be accompanied in this process as well. We would love to brain storm with you ideas on how your parish can accompany parents and families.



A Sample Message to Parents

Important: Please remember that in everything we have given here, there is no more important step than the first and that is to begin everything in a conversation within the context of building a solid and fruitful relationship.

Dear Parents,

Jesus loves you, and He wants to have a deep and intimate relationship with you. You are God's very own and are a key player in God's plan for creation. Your family is the center of community life and as parents, you are the key source in forming our next generation. Pope Saint John Paul II once said "the future of humanity passes by way of the family" and that the family is "a domestic church, a little church". In God's plan, parents are the head of the domestic church and as such, you have the greatest influence over your children. You are the ever present models in their faith development and your own spiritual development and commitment to the faith and Church speaks volumes over any faith formation or youth ministry program. In it's right order, the Universal Church thrives and grows when the domestic church thrives and grows.

We want to partner with you in the formation of your children, but more importantly, we want to walk with you toward that deeper relationship with Jesus Christ so that you can fulfill your roll and become that living testimony of faith to your child, your family and your community. In order to get there, we need to know how we can accompany and support you. We believe this begins with a conversation and we invite you to sit down with us and share so that we can begin our journey together. Your children need you - Your Church needs you - Jesus needs you!

Ministry Note:

In addition to Youth Minister/DRE and Parent interviews, when implementing the vision for small group ministry, parish mentors are asked to build a genuine relationship with parents by reaching out to them bi weekly, by phone, and initiate a conversation with 4 simple steps:

- 1. How can I pray for you this week?**
- 2. Is there anything I need to know about _____ or is there anything you want me to reinforce for you in small group?**
- 3. I would like to remind you about the following small group schedule and events...**
- 4. An invitation to something.**

An Example of The Field Hospital Approach

“I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds and you have to start from the ground up.”

~Pope Francis, *A Big Heart Open To God*, America Magazine

Youth ministry leaders in a collaboration meeting in the Diocese of Palm Beach, pulled together and further developed their experiences at the parish level to create this example of Pope Francis' desire for a parish to be a "field hospital".



FIRST RESPONDERS

The First Responders reach out to new or un-connected families whom they engage in conversation after Mass, Faith Formation, etc., and invite them into community.

Case Study: St. Bernadette, Port Saint Lucie

Note: In this case, families build intimate friendships that lead to invitation to experience deeper conversion through retreat experiences and the sacramental life.



TRIAGE

Triage takes place in an initial visit or interview between a parent/family and the ministry leader. Listening, finding needs, locating wounds and removing obstacles allows the family to be present to the ministry and predisposed to conversion.

Case Study: St. Lucie, Port Saint Lucie

Note: There are a number of inventories and interviews that can be used. This parish used *Visit* from Pathways. This process was well received by parents.



SURGERY

Surgery happens through the direct pastoral care of a person by the pastor, parish priest or deacon. The purpose is to heal the wounds identified through triage. This can happen in an individual or group setting depending on the situation.

Case Study: St. Jude, Boca Raton

Note: This has been a naturally occurring process in the life and ministry of this parish. The pastor is active in seeking out and meeting with parents and families individually and in the group setting, both on and off campus.



PHYSICAL THERAPY

Physical Therapy is the parent/youth/mentor relationship phase. Mentors periodically follow up with the parents of youth in their small groups. Care of the family is the goal of this communication.

Case Study: St. Jude, Tequesta, St. Lucie, Port Saint Lucie, St. Jude, Boca

Note: This contact more easily happens when initial and periodic “ice breaker” gathering happens allowing mentors and parents to meet in a neutral setting.

Resources for Accompaniment

What is Accompaniment:

[The Art of Accompaniment](#)

[How to Accompany Others](#)

[FOCUS - The Do's and Don'ts](#)

[Partnering With Parents - USCCB](#)

[Ministry of Mentoring - Franciscan Catechetical Inst.](#)

Accompaniment Process:

[Pathways Faith Formation - Visit](#)

[Catholics Come Home](#)

[Discipleship Quads](#)

[Focus Discipleship](#)

Just for Parents:

[What is the Domestic Church](#)

[Raising Catholic Children – Be the Model](#)

[Ministry of Parenting - Franciscan Catechetical Inst.](#)

[Become a Catholic Household - Catholic Hom](#)

[FORMED—The Catholic Parent](#)

We would love to have a conversation about how ministry at your parish can connect with parents. Let's have a conversation and brainstorm together. Please reach out and let's get together soon!



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