Three ways catechists can support families

Catechists can support families to encounter Christ as a family in many ways. The Catholic faith offers a variety of wonderful, inspirational opportunities to grow in the faith together. Here are just a few based on the grace trifecta.

Prayer

Catechists understand the importance of children learning the traditional prayers of the Catholic faith – Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be. One fun way to motivate practicing prayers at home is by creating a simple puzzle game. Print out the prayer to a cardboard box (recycled cereal boxes work well), and cut it into puzzle pieces. Pinterest has many free documents to download to make this activity easy to prepare. Children can learn the prayer by assembling the puzzle pieces together.

In addition to the traditional memorized prayers, it is also beneficial to encourage children to pray from their heart. These conversations with God can be encouraged through a card game utilized by families during dinner together. Have your students create conversation starter cards on index cards in class, then bring them home and place them on or near the table.

Each evening the family chooses a question or topic from the cards (families are encouraged to create additional cards, especially if they have other children living at home). The idea is for the family to model how easy discussions can be with the people you love.

God loves you and enjoys hearing from us. With time and practice, children will find that both traditional and spontaneous prayer have become a very natural part of their

lives.

Father Patrick Peyton, founder of Family Rosary, had a simple slogan about the importance of prayer in the family. He coined the phrase, “the family that prays together stays together.” The rosary is a wonderful tool by which families can enter into prayer. However, as many parents who have tried to pray it as a family can attest, this easy, yet powerful prayer practice is not always so simple to pray with kids.

Even as an adult, I have used images to guide my attention during the rosary. For our family, using images holds a special place in our family prayer, as my daughter is deaf and explaining some of the mysteries in all their glory can be difficult with her limited language.

OSV offers a beautiful, and newly updated book series called “The Illuminated Rosary.” In the “The Illuminated Rosary,” each bead of the rosary is a page with the full text of the accompanying prayer and sacred art for meditation. It’s a great way to introduce even the youngest kids to the beauty of the family rosary!

Sacrament

The sacraments of confession and the Eucharist are two ongoing encounters we can have with Jesus. Catechists often play a crucial role in relating to families the importance of regularly seeking grace in these sacraments.

One way to enkindle families to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation is to illustrate what a true gift it is being able to hear the words of absolution. The Catholic faith does not leave one wondering if Jesus has heard and forgiven them. The priest, “in persona Christi” (in the person of Christ), professes those words thus removing all doubt.

As a physical reminder of this gift, each child can complete a simple gift-box making activity (either in class or at home).

If being completed as part of your religious education lesson, ask for donations of small boxes (shoe box or smaller) and wrapping paper. On the inside bottom of the box write or paste the words “The Lord has freed you from sin,” or “I absolve you from your sins.” Then wrap the box and the cover separately, so that the cover can be removed to peek inside.

Scripture

To support families to perhaps prepare a little better for Mass, suggest reading the Sunday Gospel before coming to church. Send a note home with children with a link to the weekly readings section of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. If you think it would be helpful, include a few discussion questions to help jump-start their pre-Mass conversation.

The Bible is the inspired word of God and an integral part of the Catholic Mass and many traditional prayers. A few suggestions for helping families spend time in God’s Word include providing opportunities for parents to purchase low-cost, quality Bibles.

In your curriculum, you can provide a weekly verse for children to copy and bring home to share. Families should be encouraged to place the verse in a prominent place so it can be read often, set aside at least 15 minutes to discuss the what words or thoughts touch them from this particular Scripture, and even to memorize each verse.

Not familiar enough with the Bible to select verses to share? It is easy to find verses to share especially by using websites such as biblegateway.com, be sure to use either the NABRE or NASB versions. You can search by keyword such as love, courage, or hope; or begin with a verse from the Psalms, Proverbs or the words of Jesus in the Gospels.