



Our Lady of the Visitation Catholic Church

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

Greetings and blessings in the name of Our Risen Lord Jesus Christ!

In 2010, groundbreaking research of some 3,300 youth and parents (centered on youth and religion in the U.S.) was documented in the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). Several of the study's findings, I would like to share with you, as collectively the U.S. Catholic Church continues to the focus on needed revisions of the U.S. Catholic Church's Children and Youth Faith Formation Programs.

1. **Parents Matter:** The NSYR found that perhaps the most prominent finding involves the role of parents: *"The single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. ... [N]umerous parent-teen 'mirrors' [showed] a clear and accurate reflection between what the parents did and believed and what their teens did and believe."*
2. **The Power of Faith:** *"[R]eligious faith and practice themselves exert significant, positive, direct and indirect influences on the lives of teenagers, helping to foster healthier, more engaged adolescents, who live more constructive and promising lives. Teens that practice and develop their faith beyond a superficial level appear happier and healthier than those who do not."*
3. *"One of the more surprising findings from the NSYR research is where Catholic teens ranked among Christian denominations in regard to living and practicing their faith. When the specific religious behaviors like reading Scripture or praying alone, attending retreats, youth group, or religious services were examined, the rankings appeared like this:*

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 1. | Mormons | 5. | <u>Catholics</u> |
| 2. | Conservative Protestants | 6. | Jewish |
| 3. | Black Protestants | 7. | Non-Religious" |
| 4. | Mainline Protestant | | |

4. **An Apprentice Role:** *“Together, parents, catechists, youth ministry leaders, priests and bishops, journey with our young people along the road of discipleship. This ‘walking with’ approach is known as ‘apprenticing’ and is one of the major shifts required in Catholic faith formation today.”* This revised approach to children and youth Catholic faith formation requires an *“active and hands-on learning and living approach, supported by concrete opportunities to practice discipleship at church, home, school, and in the community.”*

“The NSYR research identified parents as the most powerful teachers of faith to their children and teens; more powerful than any bishop or priest or youth minister and more lasting than any faith formation program.”

This research helped to identify some suggestions and proven faith-based practices by parents/guardians with their children/youth in the home, which included: (a) Making meal times sacred and inviting (*apprenticing*) children and teens in leading prayer; (b) Reading and discussing Scripture as a family; (c) Praying together outside of meal times; (d) Displaying religious art around the house and ensuring everyone in the home has a Bible of their own; (e) Encouraging and supporting each child/youth to become actively involved in some form of parish ministry and/or community service (reaching beyond the parish boundary to serve); (f) Teaching them the difference between Wants and Needs; (g) Using a Catholic lens in your family discussions; and lastly, (h) Making Mass, youth ministry, Christian stewardship, and church events cherished, important, and high family priorities.

In closing, those entrusted with the teaching authority and responsibility in the Catholic faith (bishops, priests, and parish catechists) cannot effectively catechize the parish’s children and youth alone. As the Domestic Church, we need your help and involvement in fostering a Catholic way-of-life with child(ren) in the home first also.

As we begin to face the secular challenges in the 21st Century to the Christian Church, I ask that, if you’re not already doing so, please consider and utilize some or all of the aforementioned beneficial suggestions/practices, in helping to cultivate the seed of our Catholic faith in your child’s heart, planted at the time of their baptism.

Together, during this pontifical Year of Marriage and the Family, as catechetical partners in the faith, we can make the difference in the lives of our children and youth, the community, and the world as we evangelize the Good News of Christ!

Thank you and may God bless you abundantly in your good works!

Respectfully
Yours in Christ,

Fr. Bob Newbury
Pastor