

Growing Up Catholic Whole Family Catechesis Sessions

General Leader Guide

Coaching Parents to Form their Own Children through Whole Family Catechesis

What We Know: “The family as a locus of catechesis has a unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values... It is, indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured into periods.” (GDC, 255)

But parents need our help. “At the same time, the Church promises to help parents foster their children’s faith and assists them specifically in their role as catechists of their children, whether they assume complete responsibility themselves or look to the parish school or religious education program for help and support.” (NDC, 54C)

What To Do: As parish leaders and catechists, developing a partnership with parents is a privileged responsibility and a blessing, a blessing for the families that will be touched through such parish support, and a blessing for the family of faith, the parish community. *Coaching parents to form their own children in our faith is a way of partnering with parents* that will help them to develop and nurture an intimate relationship with God and each other. For more on this essential topic, please read *Great Expectations: A Pastoral Guide for Partnering with Parents*. This easy-to-read handbook provides the foundations for faith formation or catechesis events, such as the one outline here.

Why This Is Important: **Whole Family Catechesis or Faith Formation Events** are a means for the pastor, catechetical leader and catechists to provide parents with the support they need in order to live faith in their homes. The meetings are intended to help parents feel the support of a loving parish community that cares about them. *This is extremely important!* Engaging people in the process of faith formation through such events will have the vital effect of helping the family to feel they truly belong and are of value within the community of believers while equipping parents to live and teach their faith at home. By coaching parents in the context of events at the parish, we are building a lasting connection between the domestic church, the family, and the community of believers, the Body of Christ.



How This Works

The **Whole Family Catechesis or Faith Formation Event** that is outlined in this resource:

- ❖ Introduces parents to essential themes of our faith;
- ❖ Gives parents an opportunity to share with and teach their children, guided by a coach;
- ❖ Offers parents an opportunity to learn and share with each other;
- ❖ Provides parents with ideas for infusing their households with living faith;

Who is this Event For?

- ❖ Families with children of all ages, seated together.
- ❖ Other adults who attend without children.
- ❖ Youth and young adults from the parish.
- ❖ Because we want to coach parents to form their own children, group them together as much as possible.
 - If one parent with one child attends, group these two with other like family groups, for example.
 - If a family attends with several children, form one group for them alone.
 - Group youth or young adults together as much as possible.
 - For adults with no children, form groups of like people, or sprinkle them throughout the groups, depending on your situation.
- ❖ Form groups of 5 to 8 people, as a rule. Try to form groups of the same size so the sharing times will be somewhat uniform. (Larger groups will need more time than smaller ones, throwing off your timing.)
- ❖ Note that the content in this event outline is addressed mainly to adults, who are then invited to share it with their own children. This is how the faith is passed from generation to generation.

Background

This resource will help you organize a meeting in your parish at which you can coach parents to teach and form their own children through a **Whole Family Catechesis or Faith Formation Event**. This outline includes:

- ❖ Prayer and Introduction of the Theme for the meeting
- ❖ Optional: dismissal for young children
- ❖ The complete theological talking points for you as catechist
- ❖ Handouts
- ❖ Evaluation sheet

The meeting is designed to take approximately 60-75 minutes.



Materials to have ready from the parish or school

- ❖ Nametags & markers
- ❖ Signs to welcome and announce the event
- ❖ Pens or pencils and writing paper on each table
- ❖ A Bible for each table
- ❖ A prayer table, located centrally
- ❖ A Microphone and lectern (optional)
- ❖ Piano and instruments (optional)
- ❖ A Lectionary

Resource Documents

- ❖ The handout(s) are at the end of each packet. You have permission to reproduce it for use at your event.
- ❖ The first page of each handout is marked with this icon. ►
- ❖ There is a separate evaluation form to be used at the end of each evening.



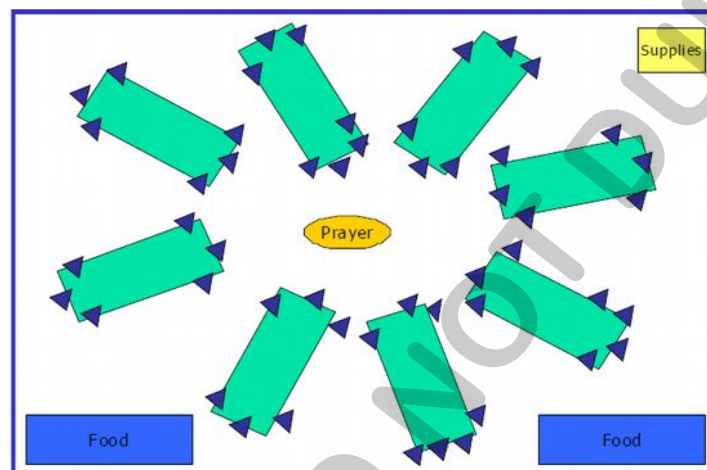
For the Whole Family Catechesis or Faith Formation Event

- ❖ Prepare several “roaming catechists” who will be available to coach the parents during the family sharing time.
 - Roaming catechists are “extras” in the room who keep an eye on what’s happening and can step in if a family seems to be lost or having trouble.
 - They should be very discreet and limit their interventions to the minimum. In general, it’s best to allow family groups to work their own way through these exercises.
 - Choose people as roaming catechists who can be subtle and gentle with folks. Avoid those who tend to say too much.
- ❖ All leaders should read through the event outline well in advance.
- ❖ All leaders should be familiar with the theology for each topic, which is included in the outline and is drawn from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- ❖ It’s important that the leader of the event not read our suggested texts word for word. The material we supply is as a sample only. The leader should use his or her own words but cover all the major points in our outlines.



Room Set-up suggestions

- ❖ Keep the lighting low and friendly. Bright lights can be intimidating.
- ❖ As much as possible, make this a welcoming space!
- ❖ While the prayer time will be brief, having a well-prepared prayer space will properly set the tone for the gathering. Use the color for the liturgical season and a candle to focus the space for prayer.
- ❖ The best set-up will be with tables (either long or round will work fine) and chairs. Invite people who come with family members to sit together. If you use long tables, invite families to cluster at the ends of a table like this:



Gather and Welcome (30 minutes prior to presentation)

This is an opportunity to welcome people who are new to the meetings as well as those who have participated in the past. Remember that it is often true that people who attend may not regularly attend Mass. Many come to these meetings to support their children. We want to make them feel welcome and comfortable here.

- ❖ Design a large poster welcoming everyone and announcing the gathering theme (e.g. “Where Do You Meet God?”)
- ❖ Supply name tags for everyone, including the pastor and staff.
- ❖ Provide beverages and snacks.
- ❖ Prepare three volunteer readers in advance, and provide them with the passage each will read (in the opening introduction to tonight’s topic).
- ❖ Ask all your volunteers to arrive 15 minutes early, in order to be ready to welcome all the participants as they arrive. They should keep introducing people to one another as new people arrive.
- ❖ Greet people at the door and provide childcare for those who want it.
- ❖ The pastor and staff should move freely about the room as people arrive, and be seated at one of the tables among the participants for the process. Encourage them not to stand at the perimeter of the room as “sightseers” because this often makes participants uncomfortable.
- ❖ Play an appropriate hymn softly as everyone arrives. Keep the lights turned low and have each table ready with tonight’s supplies and décor.



REVELATION

Helping Our Family Know God

Whole Family Catechesis Session • Leader Guide

To the Leaders

Please read through the Leader's Guide for Whole Family Catechesis to get the details about how to plan, organize, and succeed with these events.

Objectives

Here's how we will spend our time together in these sessions.

These sessions are **for you** and **about you** and your family.

- ❖ To recognize that God has revealed and given himself to us out of love;
- ❖ To appreciate that God reveals the divine life to us by gradually communicating God's own mystery in deeds and in words;
- ❖ To more fully understand that God has communicated himself to us from the beginning of the human race;
- ❖ To appreciate that God has revealed himself fully through Jesus Christ, in whom God has established an eternal covenant.
- ❖ To learn how to talk as a family about God in ways that will help you all grow together in love and faith.



Overview and Timeline

Use the following table to plan your timeline. Fill in the target time that you expect to be at each section to help you stay on schedule.

	Approximate length	Target time
❶ Check In and Get Started	5 min	
❷ Prayer	6-7 min	
❸ Introduce the Theme	5 min	
❹ Table Sharing on the Theme	10 min	
❺ Dismissal of Young Children (Optional)	2 min	
❻ Developing the Theme	6 min	
❼ The Theology of God	15-25 min	
❽ Going a Bit Deeper	5 min	
❾ Sending It Home	2-3 min	
❿ Evaluation	2 min	
⓫ Closing Prayer	2 min	
⓬ Shared Food		



1 Check In and Get Started (5 min.)

The lead catechist introduces him or herself and welcomes everyone formally from the center of the room, using a microphone if needed. Then proceed without much fanfare. If people do not know each other, invite each group to go around and have each person introduce him or herself by sharing:

- ❖ Name & where they live.
- ❖ One loving act that they have seen, done, or read about this past week.

2 Prayer (6-7 min.)

- ❖ Begin with the Sign of the Cross
- ❖ Play or sing a Sacred Song. “God is Here” would be suitable, but choose one that people know.
- ❖ After listening, invite them to “break open the song” in their small groups using these two reflection questions. Invite parents to assist their children and talk together:
 - What does this song tell us about God?
 - What is God saying to you in the words of this song?
- ❖ The presider then closes with a brief, spontaneous prayer (such as the one below) or the Our Father.

Be sure to especially welcome any newcomers or special guests. Also be sure that any non-Catholic parents or relatives feel welcome, as they may feel out of place or uncomfortable.

If possible, provide people with a printed copy of the song lyrics.

Good and loving God,

You reveal yourself to us in many ways:
through the wonder of human life,
the beauty of creation,
the abundance of all we know and experience
as blessing and gift in our lives,
most particularly in the love of relationships
and in your love which we know through word and sacrament.

Open our eyes and ears;
help us to be attentive to your presence
and to respond in faith and action.

This we pray through Jesus Christ,
the eternal Word who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and forever.

Amen.



3 Introduce the Theme (5 min.)

The lead catechists speaks to the group, using these or similar words:

This meeting will focus on **Revelation**. God is revealed to us in many ways, many of which you have listed in our conversation just now. God is, above all, Divine Love. Out of love, God has revealed and given himself to us.

We perceive God's loving presence in the wonder of human life, the beauty of creation, and especially when we experience love in our relationships as a family or with our friends. We also experience it in the words of Sacred Scripture and in the sacraments, particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist (Mass).

God is revealed in a special way through Jesus Christ, in whom God has established an eternal covenant with humanity. We see and understand Jesus in the depths of God's love, and through Christ we are invited to live as God desires, by giving of ourselves in love as Christ loves.

How do we respond to such amazing and overwhelming love? Our primary response to God's Divine Love is faith, and in living faith, we are drawn into holiness, by patterning our decisions, choices, actions, thoughts and attitudes on the ways of Jesus Christ, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

4 Table Sharing on the Theme (10 min.)

Invite the participants to share with each other, using the following questions, or others you add:

- ❖ How do you see God in:
 - your family
 - nature
 - people who are kind to others
 - or other ways?

Remember that for some, this conversation will be easy and enjoyable, but for others, this might be very difficult.

Roaming Catechists. Be prepared to encourage the parents who seem confused or worried. Offer your support and some help by reminding parents that there are no correct or incorrect responses, and that perceiving God in the small circumstances of our lives takes practice and attentiveness.



5 Dismissal of Young Children (2 min.)

In some parishes, the leader will dismiss the youngest children, or all of the children if the meeting is held at the same time as regular religious education classes. They will go to another room for activities more suited to their age. If you do this, use this dismissal, or simply create one of your own.

Dismiss the children using these or similar words:

Boys and girls, we call you forward at this time.

Give the children a few moments to come forward.

God is love, and God's loving presence
is made known to us in so many ways.

You are a sign of God's great love, did you know that?

Take time together with your catechists to share in God's love.

May you grow in this loving grace all the days of your life.

If a song is used in your parish to send children to Children's Liturgy of the Word, use that song now. If not, either send the children out in silent prayer, or sing a song such as "If You Believe and I Believe" (GIA, Haas). The children then move to their separate spaces.

Children may be dismissed to regularly scheduled Religious Education classes, a Liturgy of the Word for Children, or another age-appropriate activity.

6 Developing the Theme (6 min.)

The leader continues to develop the content of this event, using these talking points:

It is a powerful thing to think about love, especially to consider the tremendous and transforming love of God. Tonight we will allow ourselves to dwell in this love for a while. We will let ourselves consider how deeply we are loved, and what our response to such love can be, should be. God is here with us now, and reflecting on the assurance of God's presence within and among us will urge us to become more like the One whom we love and adore.



Handouts

Using the "God is With Us! A Collage of Love" handout, invite participants to think of ways that God shows how much he loves us. The handout has an instruction for the small groups on it. This might take about 4 minutes.



7 The Theology of God (15–25 min.)

Continue with the key points in the theological outline below, using the suggested discussion questions and activities.

God is Divine Love

God showed from the beginning of human life
what he was like,
that he has a heart full of Love.

God invited us to be close to him
and placed within us the seeds of divine life:
grace,
love,
justice, and
goodness.

When we failed to love God in return,
this desire to show the divine heart to us humans
did not wane.

God remained with us and would not stop loving us.

Invite participants to discuss this question:

When those closest to you “reveal” themselves, how do they do it? And what do you learn about them?

The promise

In fact, God kept promising salvation,
redemption,
and eternal life.

Down through history, this desire to be close to us
has never ceased.

Recall the words of our own Eucharistic prayer at Mass
“Even when [we] disobeyed you
and lost your friendship
you did not abandon [us] to the power of death. . .
Again and again you offered a covenant to [us]...”

The covenant with Noah

Sin became a reality in the human race
but God stayed with us.

Scripture speaks of the covenant with Noah
after the flood.



It describes how God responds to us.

The Book of Genesis is where you find this story.

In chapter 9, verses 8-13, God speaks,
to Noah and to us:

“As for me, I am establishing my covenant
with you and your descendants after you,
and with every living creature that is with you,
the birds,
the domestic animals,
and every animal of the earth with you...

I establish my covenant with you...this is the sign:
I have set my bow in the clouds
and it shall be a sign...”

Without this covenant with God who is Love
we humans have no unity.

Without Love, sin overtakes the world.

Without Love, in short,
the human race is lost!

God chooses Abraham

Reading further in the Book of Genesis
chapter 12, beginning with verse 1,
we find the next chapter in the divine story:

God then called Abram from his country,
his family,
and his father's house.

God named him Abraham,
a name which means, “father of many nations”.

“In you,” God said to Abraham and Sarah,
“all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

The people descended from Sarah and Abraham
became the ancestors of the church that we know.

God continued to gradually gather his people into a family,
and we continue to honor them all:
patriarchs,
prophets
and other Old Testament figures.

God forms the people of Israel

The great works of God were far from over.

God formed Israel as a people,
as God's own people,
by freeing them from slavery in Egypt.



At Mount Sinai God established the covenant with them,
and gave them a law through Moses.

The law would help them remain faithful to God
as the one living and true God,
the Father,
the judge,
and eventually, as the Savior.

As the Constitution on Revelation puts it in article 3,
“throughout the ages,
God prepared the way for the Gospel.”

The people of Israel were
the first to hear the word of God.

The prophets later delivered God’s message more forcefully:
that this people should hope for salvation,
a new and lasting covenant intended for all
and written on their hearts.

The prophets proclaimed that God offers salvation for all,
forgiveness from their sins,
and hope for eternal life.

This message was often carried by the poor,
as the Catechism reminds us in article 64,
and by holy women such as
Sarah,
Rebecca,
Rachel,
Miriam,
Deborah,
Hannah,
Judith, and
Esther.

The purest figure among them all is Mary.

Invite small groups to draw a simple timeline, showing how “salvation history” unfolded down through the centuries up to and including Jesus Christ. Ask them to list the leading figures, the key events, and have them bring the timeline right up to their own lives here right now! This may sound intimidating to them, but encourage them and offer help.

Invite small groups to discuss this:

Who has told you about God? Who has shown you God’s love?



God's Word

"In the beginning," John's Gospel tells us
in chapter 1, verse 1,
"was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God."

"Long ago," the Letter to Hebrews says
in chapter 1, verse 1,
"God spoke to our ancestors
in many and various ways by the prophets,
but in these last days
he has spoken to us by a Son..."

God spoke one amazing,
perfect,
and complete word to us
and that word is **Jesus**
the Son of God, now human.

We await no further word.

If we focus our attentions on Christ,
and fix our gaze upon his Cross,
we will see here the summary of all
which God spoke through prophets,
patriarchs,
or first parents.

Here God reveals all God wishes to tell us,
about love,
forgiveness,
generosity
and God's own Spirit.

Invite small groups to discuss this:

What does Jesus call us to do? How does he want us to live? Specifically, how would Jesus teach us about generosity toward each other, forgiveness, love for our friends and our enemies, or other elements of daily life?



8 Going a Bit Deeper (5 min.)

The leader continues to develop the content of this event, using these talking points:

“Seeing is believing,” we sometimes hear. Yet, in faith, we believe in God and God’s love through ways that are not completely “see-able.” Our experience of love, care, kindness, compassion, patience, mercy, forgiveness, and security help us to know God, even though we can’t really “see” them with our eyes. We can only see them with our heart.

As a way of helping all of this to sink in, talk with your small group about the ways you experience and know God’s love and presence.



Handouts

Return to the “God is With Us! A Collage of Love” handout to begin your conversation. [Optional: have magazines, pictures, and markers available for this exercise.] Think of the boxes on the paper as picture frames that will gather your images of the ways you experience God and God’s love in your lives.

Roaming Catechists: Offer help finding supplies or trading materials from table to table, and as you do so, offer your support to parents as they lead the conversation with their children. Affirm the families or tables as their picture frames begin to fill with images of God’s presence perceived through relationships, sacraments, nature, or in silence.

9 Sending It Home (2–3 min.)

Share the following ideas for bringing this topic home, as a way of extending this event:

Go to Mass a few minutes early this week. Spend a little time in quiet prayer, and also a little extra time with your parish community. Think about how your experience of the Eucharist is a sharing in Christ’s love and compassion. What does this call you and your family to do? Talk about this on your way home.

Jesus said “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18: 20) How is your family a reminder for you of Christ’s promise? How can you help each other to know God’s love more deeply?

Christ teaches us that we will know him through those who most need our care: the poor, lonely, ill, outcasts. What concrete thing can you and your family do to share Christ’s love with another? Make a commitment to do this in the coming month, and talk about how you experience God’s love as you share God’s love.



10 Evaluation (2 min.)



Handouts

Hand out the short written evaluation tool, which can be quickly filled in and briefly shared in the table group.

Ask the table leaders to briefly sum up their table's comments to the larger group. Have table leaders collect them and give them to the lead catechist for further evaluation by the team later.

11 Closing Prayer (2 min.)

End the session using one of the following options:

- ❖ Play the song used at the beginning once again.
- ❖ End with an Our Father or Hail Mary.
- ❖ Close with a spontaneous prayer.

12 Shared Food

Invite everyone to share refreshments, such as sugar cookies frosted with crosses or hot cross buns.





Handouts

God Is With Us! A Collage of Love

Discuss how each person perceives God's love and presence. Invite each person to draw or write something in one of the squares below that represents God's love for him or her. Use more than one sheet if your group is larger than four. Optional: find and paste pictures from magazines or other sources.

Younger children will need some coaching, such as "God created everything. We are reminded of God's love in beautiful things like flowers or trees. Can you draw a tree or flower?"





Evaluation of This Experience

1. How well did this experience connect to your daily life?

circle one please

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
---not very well ----- poorly-----pretty well-----very well!-----excellently-----

Please explain:

2. How did this experience help you grow in your faith and connection to the parish and the church?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
---not very well ----- poorly-----pretty well-----very well!-----excellently-----

Please explain:

3. What could we have done better in your opinion?

4. What other kinds of faith formation would you like to see for the future here in our parish?

5. Who else would you like to invite to take part in lifelong faith formation?

