



Cultivating
Connections
in Christ

DIOCESE OF DES MOINES

Preparing Disciples for
the Domestic Church

PARISH TOOLKIT

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Preparing Disciples for *the Domestic Church*

THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

In recent decades, the Church has affirmed the family's place at the heart of discipleship and mission. The Second Vatican Council highlighted the domestic Church—the Christian family—as a privileged place for evangelization, catechesis, and spiritual growth. This affirmation has continued in recent papal teaching, particularly St. John Paul II's "The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World"ⁱ and Pope Francis' "On Love in the Family."ⁱⁱ The most recent edition of the Directory for Catechesisⁱⁱⁱ also emphasizes that the family is the main locus of formation of disciples.

During these same decades, family structures in the United States have faced serious challenges. The breakdown of the family and the decline of the practice of the faith have been well documented,^{iv} and sociologists have found that these two phenomena are interrelated.

Pastoral strategies that ignore marriages and families have been called attempts to fight the smoke of religious decline, but not the fire.^v Put another way, when pastoral strategies try to plant the seeds of faith—evangelization and catechesis—without addressing the health of the soil—the family—they will be less than effective. To state it more hopefully, studies have shown that positive outcomes are more likely when the family participates in the formation of youth.^{vi}

Pope Francis has emphasized that evangelization efforts must go where the people are and must speak to the desires of their hearts. Even as family units have changed, a primary concern in every person's heart is his or her domestic life. Tending to these concerns, in part through aids in parenting and marriage skills, speaks a message that will be heard. This toolkit offers strategies and resources that aim to serve and strengthen families. These efforts include marriage enrichment opportunities, but they go beyond marriage enrichment, recognizing that in every culture, and particularly in our day, the family (domestic Church) comes in all shapes and sizes. Without diminishing the importance or beauty of a healthy marriage, the resources below attempt to meet and accompany families in any circumstance or situation.

No single pastoral strategy is sufficient to ensure effective pastoral care, and diocesan staff are available for consultation and support whenever a parish is implementing a ministry initiative targeted toward marriages and families.

THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- The primary vocation of parents is to ensure the education and religious formation of their children. The family is a school of virtue.
- The unity, charity, and conjugal love shared between a married man and woman reflects the image and likeness of God and his love for us. Sacramental marriage is a source of great joy and happiness. Marriage and family life reflect God's covenant, in Christ, to the world.
- Effective evangelization within family life and marriage ministry requires a focus on the "art of accompaniment."

Before any ministry initiative begins, it is important to review the landscape, set clear goals, and develop a plan for assessment.

PARISH ASSESSMENT

When preparing disciples for the domestic Church, some central questions that can help a parish assess their ministry strategy include:

1. Does our parish strive to meet families where they are, both by ministries that leave the parish campus and ministries that address the needs and experiences of families in their day-to-day lives?
2. Does our parish honor the role of parents as the first evangelizers and catechists of their children? One way to measure this is to review the investment of time, personnel, space, materials, and cost that is made in adult faith formation, compared to the investments that are made in youth activities.
3. Does our parish effectively accompany families in their daily struggles and challenges? One sign of this is the existence of ministries that serve families and couples who are struggling.

The following questions are rooted in the 2023 Convocation of the National Community of Catechetical Leaders (NCCL), *Journey toward the Future of Catechesis*.

4. Does our parish have a shared vision for catechesis that forms families and people of all ages in getting to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel of liberating salvation, choosing Jesus' way of life, and living the mission of Christ?
5. Through our catechetical ministry, do families and people of all ages hear the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus and his saving death and resurrection so their lives may be transformed into disciples of Jesus Christ?
6. Is our catechetical ministry (programs, activities, experiences) guided by an understanding of catechesis as accompaniment, education, and formation that is for all ages and families?
7. Does our catechetical ministry see human experience as integral to catechesis—its content and method—and does it seek to help illuminate and interpret people's experiences of life in the light of the Gospel?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Theological and Pastoral Guiding Principles

Gaudium et Spes, “The Church in the Modern World,” Vatican II

Familiaris Consortio, “Fellowship of the Family,” Apostolic Exhortation by Pope John Paul II

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, USCCB Pastoral Plan (1999)

Sacramentum Caritatis, “The Sacrament of Charity,” Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Benedict XVI

Evangelii Gaudium, “Joy of the Gospel,” Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis

Address of Pope Francis for the Conclusion of the Extraordinary Synod on the Family (October 18, 2014)

Amoris Laetitia, “The Joy of Love,” Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation

Directory for Catechesis by Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020

Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life –Dicastery for the Laity, the Family, and Life (2022)

Assessing and Setting Goals

The Disciple Maker Index is a comprehensive parish survey that can help a parish develop an awareness of its culture and its effectiveness in comparison to other Catholic parishes around the country. The survey has been developed by the Catholic Leadership Institute, which offers further consultation to help parishes develop a plan of action. <https://www.catholicleaders.org/disciple-maker-index>

SMART GOALS, <https://resources.catholicleaders.org/dmi-resources-home/dmi-resources-reporting-and-planning-resources/smart-goals>

Traction by Gino Wickman, an effective planning format published by BenBellaBooks.

Parish Staff & Leadership Training

The Disciple Maker Index is a comprehensive parish survey that can help a parish develop an awareness of its culture and its effectiveness in comparison to other Catholic parishes around the country. The survey has been developed by the Catholic Leadership Institute, which offers further consultation to help parishes develop a plan of action. <https://www.catholicleaders.org/disciple-maker-index>

SMART GOALS, <https://resources.catholicleaders.org/dmi-resources-home/dmi-resources-reporting-and-planning-resources/smart-goals>

Traction by Gino Wickman, an effective planning format published by BenBellaBooks.

BEST PRACTICES

Every situation is different, and so, in addition to the listed best practices, the diocesan Marriage and Family Life Office is available for consultation and support whenever a parish is implementing a ministry initiative targeted toward marriages and families.

1. PASTORAL ACCOMPANIMENT

There are no quick fixes. Parishes must cultivate ministries that engage and accompany people for extended periods of time.

2. A CHURCH THAT “GOES OUT”

If parishioners and other individuals no longer come to the parish campus, pastoral ministers must be willing to go out and meet them within their own context.

3. ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS PEOPLE ARE ASKING

Many couples are looking for skills to strengthen their marriages and their families. Offering opportunities to address the concrete realities of family life will strengthen bonds between parishioners and parishes.

4. EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FAMILY UNIT

Efforts should engage not only individuals, but also families and communities that can be mutually supportive and enriching.

5. HOLISTIC FORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Ministry that provides a holistic formation for families and people of all ages, including:

- Knowledge of the faith
- Understanding and experiencing liturgical celebrations
- Christian formation of the moral conscience
- Educating for prayer and in prayer
- Belonging to the Church and living its mission



LIFE IN CHRIST: RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AS FIRST CATECHISTS OF THEIR CHILDREN

The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfilment of their educational mission. She must always do this by helping them to appreciate their proper role and to realize that by their reception of the sacrament of marriage they become ministers of their children's education. - Pope Francis, "On Love in the Family", p85

Parents reveal the face of God to their children in all their interactions from their earliest ages. The family is where children first experience God's love and care, where they first learn to share, to care for others, to forgive and be forgiven. Parents need support in this role, both in attending to their own formation in faith and to that of their children. The following resources offer tools to support parents as they embrace their role as the first catechists of their children.



RECOMMENDED TOOLS

FASHIONING FAITH

Fashioning Faith offers access to thousands of resources that can be searched by topic, age, and other categories. For each topic, a variety of formats are offered, including all ages learning together, breakouts by age, take-home activities, parent retreats, and many more. Resources are available as PDF files to be used as is, or in Word, to be adapted to parish needs, and are often accompanied by PowerPoint presentations. This collection also contains resources relevant to sections two and four of this toolkit. <https://pastoral.center/fashioning-faith>.

INTERGENERATIONAL FAITH

These resources, now updated, were originally developed in the early 2000s to serve parishes embracing the Generations of Faith faith-formation model. They are now available online, at no cost, for parishes to use as is or to adapt. Each session offers options for adaptation to different ages and models. Most are available as PDFs, as well as Word documents that can be edited. Some have been adapted for an ecumenical audience, but all content is appropriate for Catholic parishes to use. The section on "Christian Practices" was developed in recent years for an ecumenical audience. Published by Lifelong Faith Associates. <https://www.intergenerationalfaith.com>

PATHWAYS

Pathways is a whole-family ministry suite with flexible options for different family circumstances. It provides a model for true accompaniment of families, for building of relationships, and for meaningful pastoral care of families. Published by Faith and Family Life Catholic Ministries. Some materials are available in Spanish. This resource is also relevant to sections two and three of this toolkit. <https://www.fflcm.org/pathways>

Note: Many parishes are beginning to move toward more family-centered options for their formal catechetical programs. The number of resources available for this is increasing rapidly. If your parish is considering a move to a more family-oriented or intergenerational option for your faith-formation program, or simply looking at different curriculum options for your existing program, please contact John Gaffney jgaffney@dmdiocese.org at the diocesan office for more information.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites and Organizations

Catholic Family Faith provides a wide variety of curated resources for parish leaders related to several areas of family ministry. These include faith practice (prayer, service, reading the Bible, etc.), parenting, liturgical year, sacraments, and more. <https://www.catholicfamilyfaith.org>

National Community of Catechetical Leaders (NCCL) offers training, webinars, research, Church documents, and other resources for parish ministers for their own enrichment and training. www.ncclcatholic.org

Life Long Faith is dedicated to ministry to all the generations in a parish. It includes information on the latest research, best practices, use of technology, curated resources, parish programming, and more. <https://www.lifelongfaith.com>

Books

Families at the Center of Faith Formation (2016) by Leif Kehrwald, John Roberto, Gene Roehlkepartain, Jolene Roehlkepartain

Faith Formation with a New Generation (2018) by John Roberto, Lisa Brown, et al.

SACRAMENTAL LIFE: SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN SACRAMENTAL LIFE OF PARISH



If a family is centered on Christ, he will unify and illumine its entire life. - Pope Francis, "On Love in the Family", p317

Family life and the sacramental life are intimately linked and mutually enriching. Our goal in this section is to provide resources that help families connect their daily experiences to their participation in the sacraments of the Church.

Preparation to celebrate the sacraments is one aspect of parish sacramental life. When parishes are looking at programming options for this ministry, they are encouraged to engage with programs that involve parents and the family. For information about approved curriculum or programs for sacramental preparation, please contact John Gaffney jgaffney@dmdiocese.org at the diocesan office.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

CELEBRATING SUNDAY FOR CATHOLIC FAMILIES

Celebrating Sunday for Catholic Families is an annual publication that contains each Sunday's Gospel, a guide for reflecting on the Gospel as a family, ideas for conversation to and from Mass, and family activities that help with the connection between the gospel and daily family life. In the back there are prayers (Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.) with explanations about each prayer. Published by Liturgy Training Publications. Also available in Spanish: *Las familias católicas celebran el domingo*.

CATHOLIC PARENT KNOW-HOW

Catholic Parent Know-How is a series of eight-page magazines covering sacramental topics such as Why Do We Have to Go to Mass?, Preparing for Baptism, Preparing Your Child for Confirmation, First Communion, and First Reconciliation for children from kindergarten to grade 6, published by Our Sunday Visitor in English and Spanish.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites and Organizations

52 Sundays: Celebrate the Lord's Day! invites households to dive into the Sunday readings with discussion questions, fun activities, information about a saint, a recipe, and more. Published by the Archdiocese of Detroit in English and Spanish. Free. <https://www.52sundays.com>

Formed is a Catholic streaming service that provides digital/video resources for all ages covering a wide array of topics including parenting, sacraments, Bible studies, the Mass, saints, and much more. Published by the Augustine Institute. Subscriptions are free for parishioners when a parish has a membership. English and Spanish content. www.formed.org

Agape Catholic Ministries provides online marriage preparation, quinceañera preparation, a Natural Family Planning course, and more, with remote or local facilitation. This could be particularly helpful for smaller parishes or those with limited volunteer networks. English and Spanish content. <https://www.agapecatholicministries.com/>

Books

By Word and Example: A Bridge to Sacramental Formation for Parents (Ebook) is a digital resource for parents who have children preparing for the sacraments. Using the three-step spiritual formation process of encounter, accompany, and serve, parents are guided through the basic aspects of the sacraments and are also given opportunities for their families to witness the Catholic faith through acts of service to others. Published by RCL Benzinger. <https://store.rclbenzinger.com/product/word-and-example-bridge-sacramental-formation-parents>

HEALTHY, HOLY LIFE: SHARING LIFE SKILLS AND FORMATION IN THE CATHOLIC MORAL TRADITION

The family is called to join in daily prayer, to read the word of God and to share in Eucharistic communion, and thus to grow in love and become ever more fully a temple in which the Spirit dwells. - Pope Francis, "On Love in the Family", p29

Ministry efforts need to connect to people's lived experiences, so that their joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties, become our own (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 1). These resources are meant to connect to the ordinary, secular experiences and contexts that are a part of every family life.



RECOMMENDED TOOLS

PATHWAYS FORMATION SUITE

Pathways Formation Suite addresses sacramental preparation and family formation at every level. All materials focus on making the home the cornerstone of faith sharing and development and on supporting and forming parents as the primary educators of the faith. Yearly licensing costs approximately \$100 + material costs. This resource is also relevant to sections one and two of this toolkit. www.fflcm.org.

COMMUNIO

Communio assists parishes in two main areas: strategic outreach to couples and families in the area who are not engaged in the parish, and parish coaching and accountability to develop marriage and family centered ministries. Their work focuses on equipping parish leadership to effectively reach and serve their geographic community. This resource is also relevant to ministry training.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites and Organizations

The Whole Mission provides high-quality health education and support for families in all stages, with a concern for care of the whole person. Their goals are to grow and promote access to, and research for, secure methods of natural family planning, specifically the Marquette Method, and to provide breastfeeding education and support for women and families.
www.thewholemission.com

Del Rey Collective is a ministry focused on giving formation and encouragement to ordinary missionary disciples to open their homes (and porches) and host their own life-giving dinners and gatherings. www.delreycollective.com

Books

Parenting with Grace: The Catholic Parents' Guide to Raising Almost Perfect Kids, second edition by Greg and Lisa Popcak

COMMUNITY LIFE: SUPPORTING HOUSEHOLDS AND CONNECTING THEM TO THE BROADER COMMUNITY



The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches. - Pope Francis, "On Love in the Family", p87

Parishes ought to be a family of families. Seeing the parish community in this way can help us understand and address many of the challenges that exist in any community life. Resources in this section are suggested to help the local community deepen their bonds with each other.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

PARISH FAMILY FUN NIGHT

Create a fun night for parishioners of all ages! Perhaps you can plan a Catholic trivia night or a parish trivia contest. Or celebrate the parish patron saint's feast day or the founding families heritage or the current parishioners' ethnic tradition with a contest for who can cook the best Italian cookies or dress up the best in honor of St Boniface, for example. Or offer prizes for the best skit or poem or artistic rendering representing the life of St Patrick. Don't forget Mardi Gras, Las Posadas, Oktoberfest, and other seasonal and ethnic celebrations.

PARISH-LED PILGRIMAGE TO CLOISTERS ON THE PLATTE RETREAT CENTER

With family fun later at Papio Fun Park in Papillion, NE experience a wonderful retreat, prayer service, or private reflection time with the life-size Stations of the Cross at Cloisters on the Platte Retreat Center, and then head to Papio Fun Park with go-carts, batting cages, laser tag, and more.

<https://cloistersontheplatte.com/>

<https://www.papiofunpark.com/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites and Organizations

Fashioning Faith provides access to thousands of resources that can be searched by topic, age, and other categories. The library of resources features plans for movie nights, faith festivals, parish retreats activities, and more in English and some resources in Spanish.

<https://pastoral.center/fashioning-faith>

Six Dates for Catholic Couples is a parish-sponsored program of videos, worksheets, and prayers for building and strengthening marriages by encouraging husbands and wives to make time to be with each other and have fun. Spanish and English. <https://www.happy-together.net/six-dates-for-catholic-couples/>

WHEN LIFE GETS HARD: RESOURCES FOR STRUGGLING MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES

I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, "always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street. - Pope Francis, "On Love in the Family", p87

Pope Francis has called for a Church that is a field hospital and asked that ministry occur in the pastoral key of accompaniment. These resources offers ways to walk with individuals and families in difficult times.



PARISH RESPONSE TO TIMES OF STRUGGLE

People remember who showed up when their parent died and who offered help when they needed it. Most parishes minister well when a death happens. We hope that our parishes will show up when individuals or families are having a tough time in other ways as well. Parish leadership needs to be aware of other occasions or circumstances that need us to show up and to know who in the parish are willing and able to do so.

IDEAS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES

- *Providing meals for families when a member is hospitalized or has a serious illness or injury*
- *Providing meals for families after the birth or adoption of a child*
- *Helping with chores, cleaning, repairs or other things in the circumstances above*
- *Assistance to aging parishioners such as transportation, yard work, and cleaning*
- *Assisting people after a natural disaster or severe storm*
- *Outreach and accompaniment of the homebound*
- *Respite for full-time caregivers*

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but to prompt conversation about how parishes can show care and support to parishioners and members of the wider community in difficult times.

There are websites to assist with these types of projects. They include:

- www.mealtrain.com provides a platform to facilitate bringing meals to a household
- www.signupgenius.com is a sign-up platform that can be adapted for a multitude of tasks
- www.goodeggfund.org is a program that provides small one-time grants (under \$500) to help people get through a rough patch

CONNECTING PERSONS AND HOUSEHOLDS TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES

It is not unusual for those who work in parish ministry to be approached by someone who is struggling or in crisis. Often, the parish is not equipped to provide the assistance needed. At these times, it is important to know how to connect the person or family with resources in the community that can best serve them in their moment of need.

IOWA 211

Iowa 211 is a service of United Way. It offers an extensive list of agencies and organizations that respond to many types of needs. You can find it at www.uwm211.org or by calling 2-1-1.

For an immediate crisis, the website has links to hotlines dealing with suicide prevention, abuse, human trafficking, mental health issues, and more. Do not hesitate to seek help with or for the person in an emergency.

In non-emergency situations, search the website to find applicable agencies for the parishioner. Sharing your location will help to narrow the search. There is a description of each agency along with links to call them, go to their website, and get directions.

In our parish leadership roles, we are responsible to represent the teachings of the Church. When assisting with certain situations, such as an unplanned pregnancy, we must use our discretion in recommending only those agencies and services consistent with the teachings of the Church.

RECOMMENDED MINISTRIES

NOURISH PROGRAM FOR CHURCHES

Nourish Program for Churches helps equip a lay-led team to minister effectively to caregivers for elderly family members with this ongoing, Christ-centered ministry. It is available in English and Spanish. You can contact them at info@nourishforcaregivers.com

The diocesan Coordinator of Persons with Disability Ministry, Patty Origer, has experience working with establishing Nourish in parishes. Contact her at 515-237-5073 or poriger@dmdiocese.org.

RED BIRD MINISTRIES

Red Bird Ministries accompanies individuals and couples through the trauma of the loss of a child, from pregnancy through adulthood. They offer resources for individuals and parish leadership training. Learn more at www.redbird.love

LIFE-GIVING WOUNDS

Life-Giving Wounds accompanies adults who are children of divorce, an often-overlooked wound that affects children of any age. Through resources, retreats, and a growing community, Life-Giving Wounds walks with individuals affected by the divorce of their parents. Learn more at www.lifegivingwounds.org

THE THIRD OPTION

The Third Option is a ministry to assist couples in building communication skills while struggling in their marriages, providing them with practical skills and hope to heal. Couples can join at any time and there is no cost to attend. You can find information about the current program at www.dmdiocese.org/events

Information about the national program can be found at <http://thethirdoption.com>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites and Organizations

Additional resources for mental health ministry can be found on the diocesan website. www.dmdiocese.org/mentalhealthministry

Books

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work by John Gottman and Nan Silver

How to Heal Your Marriage and Nurture Lasting Love by Greg Popcak

PRAYER LIFE: INTRODUCING THE TRADITION OF CATHOLIC PRAYER IN HOUSEHOLDS



Those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union. - Pope Francis, "On Love in the Family", p316

To be Christian is to be called into a relationship with the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ. This relationship, like all relationships, grows in communication, and hence prayer is a privileged and vital place of encounter with Jesus. These resources are offered to help marriages and families grow in daily communication with God through prayer.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

CATHOLIC SPROUT

Catholic Sprouts is a website that offers many resources to use at home with children of all ages. Created by parents who were looking for ideas and ways to share their faith with their children, this site has books and resources and even a podcast. The free podcast is wonderful for creating a routine with children and having short ways to learn more about the faith. The books and resources are relevant and modern in artwork and topics and help to bring the Catholic faith alive to children. Cost varies, some free. Resources available in English and Spanish. <https://catholicsprouts.com>

CATHFAMILY!

CathFamily! offers a collection of resources on varying topics for Catholic parents, regularly updated and relevant to the liturgical season. Free. <https://cathfamily.org>

NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY

National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry offers various resources for parents of youth. <https://nfcym.org/programs/strong-catholic-families/leader-parent-resources/>

CATHOLIC HOM-HOUSEHOLDS ON MISSION

CatholicHOM - Households on Mission is an app with a monthly subscription, offering resources to build a domestic church. The website says, "When families do the things God created us to do to be healthy and holy, we worship him with our lives."

<https://www.catholicom.com>

CATHOLIC ICING

Catholic Icing offers resources for sharing and celebrating faith and prayers at home. Crafts, snacks, prayer space, books and activities to engage with children 0-12. Cost varies; some materials are free, some paid. <https://www.catholicicing.com>

HALLOW APP

Hallow App is a prayer with many resources. They offer a free 14-day trial, subscription is \$9.99/month It is available in English, Spanish, Polish, Portuguese. www.hallow.com

AMEN APP

Amen App is a free app from Ascension Press that has various prayers, podcasts, stories, and content to help build a prayer routine. You can set reminders for your nightly bedtime prayer and meditations to help set a positive sleep routine. www.amenapp.org

YOUCAT DAILY

YouCat Daily is a free website and app to help keep teens growing in faith with a daily five-minute dose of the Gospel from the Bible and a question regarding catechetical or Catholic social teaching. Includes English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Polish content. <https://youcat.org>

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- v Van Epp, John, De Gance, J. P. *Endgame: The Church's Strategic Move to Save Faith and Family in America*. United States: Love Thinks, LLC, (n.d.).
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