

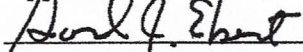
Shaped by Love: Family Catechesis and the Crisis of Disaffiliation in the Catholic Church

by
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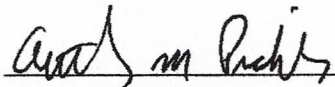
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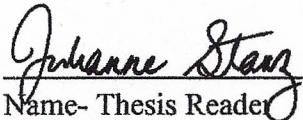
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Abstract

There is currently a crisis of disaffiliation within the Catholic Church, particularly among youth and young adults. One of the proposed solutions for the crisis of disaffiliation is implementing the family catechesis model at the parish level as a means of effectively transmitting the Catholic faith. This paper examines the data of two studies: *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* conducted by St. Mary's Press and *Ask Your Father and He Will Tell You: A Report on American Catholic Religious Parenting* produced by the McGrath Institute in order to discern if the conditions that lead to the effective transmission of the Catholic Faith can also counteract the factors that lead to disaffiliation. In addition, the ways in which sacred scripture, the model of family catechesis in the early church, the evolution of catechetical best practice, and modern church teachings support family catechesis are identified. The family catechetical model is then analyzed to determine if it is prepared to nurture households that effectively transmit the faith as identified by the McGrath Institute and to address the factors that lead to disaffiliation as put forth by the Going, Going, Gone Survey. Finally, the development, implementation, assessment, and analysis of the family catechetical model at St. Raphael Parish in Oshkosh, Wisconsin is detailed in order to provide pastoral ministers with a guide of how to best address the factors that lead to disaffiliation by supporting and equipping parents as the primary evangelizers of their children.

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“Faith grows when it is lived and shaped by love. That is why our families, our homes, are true domestic churches. They are the right place for faith to become life, and life to become faith.”
Pope Francis, *Closing Mass, 2015 World Meeting of Families*¹

Much has been written in recent years about young people becoming disaffiliated “or leaving” mainstream Christian churches. In the United States 36% of young people between the ages of 18-24 identify as “nones,” claiming no particular religious affiliation.² And although disaffiliation is occurring across all faith traditions, Catholics by far have the largest net loss of any traditional denomination. Nearly one-third (31%) of Americans report being raised in a Catholic household, but only about one in five (21%) Americans identify as Catholic currently. This loss rate is nearly 5x worse than Evangelicalism.³ A national study conducted by St. Mary’s Press and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University (CARA) entitled *“Going, Going Gone! The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics”* found that 74% of young Catholics who become disaffiliated make their decision between the ages of ten and twenty, and the median age of disaffiliation from the Catholic faith is thirteen. This means by their eighth grade year many young people who were baptised into the Catholic faith no longer identify themselves as Catholic. Even more distressing, the CARA study showed that

¹ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Transcript: Pope Francis's Homily at His Final Mass of His Historic Trip to the United States,” *The Washington Post* (WP Company, September 27, 2015), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/09/27/transcript-pope-franciss-homily-at-his-final-mass-of-his-historic-trip-to-the-united-states/>

² Bourbon, Julie. “Why are Young Catholics Leaving?” *The National Catholic Reporter*. Feb. 9-22, 2018. Vol 53, no 9.

³ Douglas Beaumont, “Catechetical Leadership: On Family Faith Formation in the Parish,” Douglas Beaumont, March 22, 2019, <https://douglasbeaumont.com/2019/01/08/on-family-faith-formation-in-the-parish>

disaffiliation can happen as early as the fifth grade. Not only that, but most youth claimed they never talked to their parents about their doubts or questions before they became disaffiliated.⁴

As the coordinator of religious education, but more importantly as a parent of a three year old son, I find this data very concerning. Why? Not for reasons related to job security or because I want to “keep” my son Andrew Catholic, but because I know how my relationship with Christ has carried me throughout my life. The community of disciples that is the Church has supported me in both the joys and sorrows of my life, and I want Andrew and all young people to experience that kind of love and develop deep, authentic and life giving friendships that are built on a shared belief in God and heartfelt compassion for others. I want him to be fed spiritually at the Eucharistic table where Jesus is found in a real and powerful way. In short, I want him to have life and have it abundantly.⁵ I truly believe that the abundant life can only be fully realized as a member of the Body of Christ. As both a parent and a follower of Jesus, I am left wondering, what, if anything, can be done to help build up the Body of Christ in our time so that Andrew can inherit the rich faith tradition that has produced so many great saints and has provided love and mercy to the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

In response to this crisis, a wide variety of evangelizing efforts have been implemented in Catholic communities across the United States. One of the solutions, family catechesis, focuses on supporting parents in their role as the primary catechists of their children in order to foster and develop the characteristics that result in the successful transmission of the Catholic faith, and as a result, stem the flood of young people who are becoming disaffiliated from the church. Within the past five years, the family catechesis model has been implemented in a variety of different ways across the United States, including within the Green Bay Diocese where I currently serve as the coordinator of religious education at St. Raphael Parish in Oshkosh. The

⁴ Dinges, William. “Our Teens are Leaving the Church, Why?” US Church. August 28, 2018.

⁵ Jn 10:10.

implementation of the family catechesis model at the parish level has left many educators, including myself, pondering if the family catechesis model is an effective means to address the factors that lead young people to become disaffiliated from the church, and if so, what is the best means of introducing the family catechesis model in order to foster the life of the domestic church that will lead to the successful transmission of the Catholic faith to the next generation of believers that is rapidly fading away.

In hopes of determining if the family catechesis model is not only a good fit for our parish, but a valid means of addressing the crisis of the disaffiliation of the next generation of Catholics, The focus of this paper is as follows:

1. Identify the key factors that contribute to youth disaffiliating themselves from the Catholic faith as put forth in the *Going Going Gone* Survey conducted by St. Mary's Press.
2. Identify the characteristics of households that promote and foster effective transmission of the faith reflected in the McGrath Institute's *Report on American Religious Parenting*.
3. Identify how sacred scripture, the model of family catechesis in the early church, the evolution of catechetical best practice, and modern church teachings point to family catechesis as a primary means to create lifelong disciples.
4. Give a brief history of how family catechesis has been implemented since Vatican II in the United States in general and the Green Bay Diocese in specific in order to understand the context of current pastoral practices in supporting the domestic church.
5. Analyze if the Family catechetical faith formation model is prepared to nurture households that effectively transmit the faith as identified by the McGrath

Institute and to address the factors that lead to disaffiliation as put forth by the *Going, Going, Gone Survey*.

6. Develop a family catechesis model at the parish level that addresses the key factors that lead to youth becoming disaffiliated from the Catholic faith by fostering households where the faith is effectively transmitted. The development of the model includes an outline of program goals, detailed description of the structure of the program, a timeline for implementation, methods of assessment, and next steps.
7. Analyze assessment data collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the St. Raphael family catechesis model in addressing the factors that lead to disaffiliation in youth by fostering and developing the characteristics that lead to effective faith transmission in the home.
8. Use analysis of data to help parish leadership discern how to move forward in addressing the factors that lead to disaffiliation by supporting parents in effectively transmitting the faith to their children

It is my hope that through analyzing current research on both the factors that lead to disaffiliation of youth and the characteristics that result in the effective transmission of faith within American Catholic households and examining what scripture, tradition, church teaching, and history reveal to us concerning the place of the domestic church in forming young disciples, that our parish leadership will be able to implement a faith formation model that can be duplicated at other parishes in order to build up the Body of Christ in the 21st century. In doing so it is my hope that, in the words of Pope Francis, pastoral ministers can help “faith becomes life, and life become faith” in every home so our children may not merely have life but have it abundantly.

Before delving into the research regarding factors that can lead to disaffiliation in order to discern the best pastoral response, it is of critical importance for church leadership to note that for each person the reasons for disaffiliation are deeply personal and complex. There is a perception among some in church leadership that because a person is young, they do not have well formed, valid, or informed reasons for leaving the Catholic Church. I have heard it said that “young people don’t really understand the truth of what they want or need” or that they are “too lazy” to commit to the faith. Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit* speaks to this misconception:

Those of us who are no longer young need to find ways of keeping close to the voices and concerns of young people. . . We need to make more room for the voices of young people to be heard: listening makes possible an exchange of gifts in a context of empathy. . . We adults can often be tempted to list all the problems and failings of today’s young people. Perhaps some will find it praiseworthy that we seem so expert in discerning difficulties and dangers. But what would be the result of such an attitude? Greater distance, less closeness, less mutual assistance. ⁶

Although the complexity of each person’s motivation for disaffiliation is unique, I discovered that when looking at the findings of the *Going, Going, Gone Survey* alongside the results of the *Report on American Religious Parenting*, a common thread too significant to ignore starts to emerge regarding the importance of the family in carrying out Jesus’ directive to go and make disciples of all nations. When looked at side by side, the data draws a direct line between the importance parents place upon faith in the home and the disaffiliation of youth, particularly in two of the archetypes detailed in the *Going, Going, Gone Survey*: the drifter and

⁶ Francis, *Christus Vivit*, apostolic exhortation, Vatican website, Dec. 8, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html, sec 38 and 66.

the injured. When one factors in the weight of scriptural support, the model of family catechesis utilized by the early Church, the evolution of catechetical best practice, and modern church teaching in the importance of parents as the first evangelizers of their children in combination with the two studies that will be examined in this paper, the reason some parishes have implemented a family catechesis model in response to rapidly emptying pews becomes clear. Yet, the question remains: does family catechesis “work” as a way of fostering a life of discipleship and a true conversion of heart in young people and their families?

In July 2015 St. Mary’s Press commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate to conduct a national survey of teens and young adults who were raised Catholic, but have since become disaffiliated. This survey was in response to large numbers of young people leaving the Catholic church. The results reported by CARA were qualitative in that they provide storied data in order to understand the dynamics of disaffiliation but the study also revealed underlying quantitative statistical data. As stressed by Pope Francis, the study conducted by CARA revealed that each person’s decision to leave is typically not made in haste and is not taken lightly.⁷ With the understanding that each person’s experience is unique, there are six common dynamics of disaffiliation identified in the survey that can set into motion a young person’s separation from the faith tradition he or she was raised in. Understanding these dynamics is key to pastoral response in regards to the disaffiliation of youth. The first is an event or series of events that triggers feelings of question or doubt.⁸ Typically this is brought on when a young person begins to become aware that people who are supposedly faithful Catholics are not living according to their beliefs or the perception that God allows bad things to happen to

⁷ McCarty, Robert J and Vitek, John M. Going, *Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*, 7-8.

⁸ McCarty and Vitek, 25-26.

good people. In other words, the young person views a series of events and begins to identify a pattern which leads him or her to drift away or separate from the faith.

The second most common reason cited by young people is a worldview where faith and religious practices are seen as options among many options.⁹ Young people are exposed to a wide variety of beliefs, cultures, and lifestyles on a minute by minute basis and the idea of committing oneself to a single set of beliefs is no longer a forgone conclusion as it has been in the past. The third reason is the individual has a sense of being and free or relieved by the decision to dissociate from the Church or from belief. The beliefs of the Church seem like a burden too heavy to carry and by consciously separating from the church, the young person feels “a weight is taken off of them.”¹⁰ The weight that is felt is often the sense of being “judged” and forced to participate in religious practices that they feel are out of sync with their worldview.

It is that feeling of being forced that is the fourth common dynamic that leads to the disaffiliation of young people.¹¹ I see this dynamic at play on a daily basis as I look at the faces of some students who tell me point blank their parents are making them go to religious education and that they do not want to be there. Forcing a child to participate in any activity generally creates oppositional behavior which in turn can lead to closed hearts and minds.

The final two common dynamics of disaffiliation revolve around what many may call the secularization of Western society since the age of enlightenment. The fifth dynamic is that young people are committed to living a moral life, but that they believe that they can be ethical without being religious. In their experience you can be a good person without believing in God. The sixth common dynamic that the person “sorta” believes in God’s existence and is not closed

⁹ McCarty and Vitek, 26-27.

¹⁰ McCarty and Vitek, 27.

¹¹ McCarty and Vitek, 27-28.

to fuller belief should a rational scientific argument be presented to them.¹² For these young people, faith is a matter of the intellect and not of the heart.

Clearly, the six dynamics of disaffiliation are complex and tend to “blend” with one another with the cumulative effect being a young person’s decision to leave the Catholic faith. In the context of their research, McCarty and Vitek were able to observe that the six common dynamics of disaffiliation worked together to form three preliminary categories for disaffiliation: the injured, the drifter and the dissenter.¹³

The injured include young people who experience hardship or tragedy in which God seems absent. An example would be a young person who prayed for a family member who was ill and the loved one died.¹⁴ This misunderstanding of the nature of prayer can lead the young person to question his or her belief in God and reject faith in God as meaningless because it does not yield the desired result of healing for a loved one.¹⁵ I am currently working with a 9th grade girl right now who is in just that situation. Her grandfather passed away from cancer when she was ten and his death was followed closely by that of a friend. Since that time she has believed God is not real because her prayers did not “work.”

In addition to a tragic event such as a death or illness, divorce, frequent moving, or other family issues that cause disruptions in the life of a young person can also lead to disaffiliation. Family disruptions are especially toxic when the faith community itself is or is perceived as unwelcoming, causing a greater source of pain to the young person who feels not only disconnected from family but ostracized from the community. The faith community is then seen as hypocritical or inauthentic. This can be further reinforced if a young person has parents

¹² McCarty and Vitek, 29-31.

¹³ Mares, Courtney. “Why do some young people leave the Church? A new study investigates.” Catholic News Agency. (Accessed August 26, 2019). <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/why-do-some-young-people-leave-the-church-a-new-study-investigates-35699>.

¹⁴ Mares, “Why do some young people leave the Church?”

¹⁵ McCarty and Vitek, 17.

or other family members who have some level of involvement in the faith community but display everyday attitudes outside of church that are unethical, immoral, and judgemental.¹⁶ The perception of people of faith, especially family members, as being inauthentic or hypocritical lead young people not to affiliate since all those we are supposed to be role models of life lived in Christ are clearly not reflecting the Christ of the Gospels who reached out to heal the hurting with mercy and love.

The second archetype of disaffiliation is comprised of those who typically have trouble connecting their identity as baptized Catholics to their day to day lives. Being Catholic simply holds no relevance and it is easy to simply drift away from the Church. This group, known as the drifters, struggle with being able to explain why being Catholic matters. It is worth noting that researchers discovered that parents have a very strong influence in regards to their children drifting away from the faith.¹⁷ Without companions on the spiritual journey, young people feel abandoned, and seeking out God becomes a lonely experience. Drifters also include young people whose families are “nominal” Catholics merely going through the motions.¹⁸ Since children are like sponges, they absorb their parent’s attitudes and faith carries very little meaning in their lives outside the sacramental “events” such as First Eucharist or Confirmation. I have encountered this on multiple occasions in my ministry when parents come to “get” First Eucharist and then we do not see the family again until Confirmation, if ever. Since they have no strong feelings, positive or negative, about belief in God or being part of a faith community drifting away does not represent a significant change in the day to day life of the individual or the family.

¹⁶ McCarty and Vitek, 14-16.

¹⁷ Mares, “Why do some young people leave the Church?”

¹⁸ McCarty and Vitek, 18-19.

The third, and perhaps most well known archetype because it is the most vocal, is the dissenter. Dissenters as a group disagree with church teachings on issues such as birth control, same-sex marriage, and abortion. It is worth noting that only two percent of all respondents to the survey cited the church sex abuse scandal as a reason they decided to disaffiliate.¹⁹ Dissenters often feel that their questions are ignored and not answered. While the injured and drifters tend to be heavily influenced by family, the dissenters as a group are more influenced by peers. Dissenters often form a community of dissent with peers where they either bonded over resistance to faith or religion, or, sometimes were led by their peers to other religions where they felt they could grapple with their questions without feeling judged.²⁰ This tendency to form a community with peers who share dissenting beliefs points to a greater need for connection and community. As a collective, researchers found that dissenters share a hunger for meaning, purpose, and connection, three elements that they have found lacking in the Catholic faith based on their personal experience.²¹ It is personal experience, not the magisterium of the church or tradition, which is the default mediator of meaning and truth for these young people.

As one examines the micro factors that lead to disaffiliation, one common thread that seems to run through the data is the importance of family. If young people live within homes where they are being raised by parents who, for a variety of reasons, attach no significance to being Catholic within their family or personal lives or confess to being Catholic but live in a manner counter to Gospel values, that their children will follow suit. In two of the major archetypes, the injured and the drifter, the role of family is explicitly cited as a cause of disaffiliation and while dissenters tend to attach more importance to peer relationships, the lack

¹⁹ Mares, "Why do some young people leave the Church?"

²⁰ McCarty and Vitek, 21-23.

²¹ McCarty and Vitek, 24.

of strong adult role models in which to confide their doubts and frustrations with church teaching leaves them feeling angry and much more likely to disaffiliate at a very young age.

The three archetypes point to trends on the micro level are important and need to be heard and respected. They demand a pastoral response that is unique to each individual. However, there are also larger contextual issues at the macro level in regards to disaffiliation that go beyond personal experience.²² When considering a response to the disaffiliation of youth in the Catholic church, pastoral ministers also need to be aware of the dynamics at work at both the national and global level to truly discern what the Holy Spirit is communicating through the “signs of the times.”

The signs of the times in regards to Catholic disaffiliation on the macro level reflect the breakdown of the historical bond between religion and ethnicity, erasing a sense of Catholic “otherness.” In contrast with contemporary Asian and Hispanic immigrants, fewer Euro-American Catholics experience their faith as a communal reality. In other words, Catholics have been absorbed into the greater American culture in which faith is not a significant influence. The breakdown of the parish community as the locus for social activity is highly relevant when considering disaffiliation. There is a diminished sense of Catholic identity, not only in shared rituals, symbols, and beliefs, but in groups, friendship and organizations.²³ The community that young people are longing for, simply no longer exists. The days of the ethnically based French, Polish, German, or Irish churches depicted in black and white movies are over.

In addition to the disappearance of the parish as the social core of the Catholic life, there are three other major macro factors that are essential for pastoral ministers to be aware of so they can differentiate between the factors they can influence and those which are beyond their control.

²² Dinges, “Our Teens are Leaving the Church.”

²³ Dinges, “Our Teens are Leaving the Church.”

The first is a decline in institutional authority of all kinds, including Church leadership. The days of “Father knows best” are over. Secondly, post modern society has rejected the idea of ascribed identity. Being a “cradle Catholic” carries no significance and is no longer a determining factor when choosing a belief system. Religion is a matter of “feeling” and the decision to believe or not believe is seen as a personal choice and not communal or familial reality.²⁴

The third, and perhaps most significant macro factor can also be seen clearly at the micro level. The widespread destabilization of family life and the growing culture among young families to let children “choose” their faith, which usually means that a child chooses nothing at all. On a whole, adolescent religious values directly mirror the values of the parents.²⁵ The simple fact is that many children are being raised by parents who attach no personal significance to “being” Catholic to the narrative of their life. Catholic faith is not seen as needed for happiness, and therefore being Catholic is not important.²⁶ If one looks at Catholic beliefs and traditions as a “story” passed down from one generation to the next, then one could say that the book is never opened by parents, and therefore the story of the Catholic faith ends. The age old adage that young people will return to the faith when they have children known as the “life cycle effect” is no longer true for millennials. Once they are gone, they are gone for good. As with disaffiliation at the micro level, the importance of family emerges as a key motivating cause of disaffiliation.

Two of the initial questions for Pastoral Ministry generated by the authors of the *Going, Going, Gone* Survey concern the critical role of family life in the faith lives of young people. The researchers asked:

²⁴ Dinges, “Our Teens are Leaving the Church.”

²⁵ Dinges, “Our Teens are Leaving the Church.”

²⁶ McCarty and Vitek, 32-33.

- How might we assist parents in understanding the significant impact they have on their child's sense of connectedness to the Church? Can we assist parents in clearly stating why their faith is important to them, and equip parents with tools to help their children work through their questions, doubts, beliefs and even rejection?
- Can we prioritize families on the margins? How might we identify and reach out to the families who are drifting, dissenting or injured? ²⁷

As a religious education coordinator, a parent of a school aged child, and a member of the Body of Christ, these questions are of critical importance to me. However, before these questions can be considered it is key that Church leadership, myself included, be aware of the characteristics present in families that have been identified as effectively transmitting the the faith to their children the faith and understand how to help parents develop those characteristics in order to support each individual domestic church and reach out to families on the margins who are slowly, but steadily, drifting away.

From 2014-2016 the McGrath Institute for Church Life of the University of Notre Dame, whose mission it is to partner with Catholic dioceses, parishes and schools to address pastoral challenges, interviewed 245 parents with an oversampling of Catholic parents to listen to the culture and convictions parents reveal to see what patterns would emerge that could explain why a minority of children committed themselves to the religious identity received from their parents while others drifted from it. They asked themselves why certain parental stories, practices, and ways of communicating seemed to correspond with successful religious transmission of the faith.

²⁷ McCarty and Vitek, 35.

Successful transmission was defined as children entering adulthood as seeing being Catholic as important and younger children demonstrating enjoyment of religion.²⁸

The study, entitled *Ask your father and he will tell you: A Report on American Catholic Religious Parenting* yielded groundbreaking results that can be used to help answer the questions posed in the *Going, Going, Gone Survey*. The study identified four different components that are present in families where the Catholic faith is transmitted effectively to their children. It is my belief that when pastoral ministers such as myself understand what each of these components are they will be better able to support parents as the primary catechists of their children, strengthening the domestic church and stemming the flood of disaffiliation that is threatening to diminish faith communities as more and more young families, children, and adolescents drift away.

The four components identified in the data gathered by the McGrath institute are parent's motivating narrative, reflective intentionality, religious content, and interpretation of religious commitment.²⁹ The first component, parents' motivating narrative, is the "why" for raising faith filled children. It is the story that parents tell of their own religious journey, which is uniquely personal and frames whether, why, and how they transmit the faith to their children. In other words, parents draw from their own experiences in formation and their own worldview to transmit the faith.³⁰ It has already been established that one of the main reasons young people drift from the Catholic faith is lacking spiritual guides and mentors for the journey. Because mainstream culture, even within once ethnically Catholic communities, no longer acts as a "carrier" of Catholic beliefs, parents must act as sponsors of the Catholic faith. If children are

²⁸ Bartkus, Justin, and Christian Smith . "Ask Your Father and He Will Tell You: A Report on American Catholic Religious Parenting ." University of Notre Dame. Accessed October 15, 2019.

<https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/catholic-parenting-report.pdf>, 9-10.

²⁹ Bartkus and Smith, 18-20.

³⁰ Bartkus and Smith, 18.

not exposed to the Catholic faith by their parents in their formative years, they will usually not be exposed at all.³¹ The witness of a parent as a faith filled person is the single most powerful influence on if a child claims the Catholic faith as his or her own.

The second component involves the “how” parents transmit the faith. Reflective intentionality is the intentional channeling of a religious culture within the home. In other words, children don’t just stumble blindly into the Catholic faith. Households that effectively transmit the faith do so when parents are not only aware of the aim of raising faith filled children but use best practices to achieve these aims.³² Reflective intentionality as a parenting skill in general, not just in religious matters, takes time, energy and attention, and it is that time, energy and attention that can keep children from drifting and help parents to be more consciously aware of how certain church practices may be raising questions and doubts. When these questions and doubts are not respectfully acknowledged and addressed, young people become hurt or embittered, which in turn may lead to dissent or injury in the heart and mind of a young person..

The third component, religious content, is the “what” of how the faith is transmitted to children. Religious content includes religiously significant practices, relationships, and experiences to which children are exposed through the influence of parents.³³ One of the main reasons that youth drift from the faith is because they see it as irrelevant to their day to day lives. In homes where the faith is transmitted effectively, Catholic identity comes from day to day practices in the home³⁴, and it is in the home, not the Catholic school or religious education classroom, where children spend most of their time.³⁵ Parents have nearly total control over how much and how often children engage in their faith. They are the gatekeepers. In each

³¹ Bartkus and Smith, 15.

³² Bartkus and Smith, 18-19.

³³ Bartkus and Smith, 19.

³⁴ Bartkus and Smith, 39.

³⁵ Beaumont, “Catechetical Leadership.”

child's most formative years, parents determine how much the child prays, reads the Bible, or attends Mass, what type of sacramentals he/she has access to, and how much exposure she/he will have to parish life and relationships within the greater Catholic community.³⁶ The more religious content and experiences that parents provide for their children, the less likely children will be to drift from the faith that grounds their entire family.

The fourth component, interpretation of religious commitment, consists of "discrete events, regular occasions or extended processes by which children are not only exposed to religious content but through which they perceive religion's significance in their parents' lives, their family life, and their own orientation to the world."³⁷ In other words, parents interpret the importance of the Catholic faith for their children. Research has shown that once a young person has identified his/her parent as an authentic and trustworthy religious mentor, it is highly unlikely she/he will outright reject the faith that has anchored the child's entire life.³⁸ Parents embody what it means to be Catholic and what it means to see the world through the "lens" of faith. It is through the lens that their parents provide that children learn how to understand what is good and evil and how to practically engage the world as a person of faith.³⁹ When seen with the lens of faith and processed with frankness and mutual emotional vulnerability, even events of trauma or sadness, like death or divorce, which have been proven to cause youth to disaffiliate from the church when experienced as an unhealed wound, can bind a family together in Christ. Before children need catechism and theology they require witness, and the power of faith-filled parents is not in their knowledge of the faith, but their willingness to share what is precious to them⁴⁰, especially through meaningful conversation. Honest and frank talk about faith may be

³⁶ Bartkus and Smith, 15.

³⁷ Bartkus and Smith, 19.

³⁸ Bartkus and Smith, 49.

³⁹ Bartkus and Smit, 15.

⁴⁰ Bartkus and Smith, 66.

the single most important thing parents do to help children claim the Catholic faith as their own.

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The research done by the McGrath Institute is not only timely but it is also in line with teachings of the Church. The catechism of the Catholic Church speaks to the key role of parents as interpreters of the faith and clearly identifies parents in no uncertain terms as being foundational in helping children discover their calling as part of Church People of God:

Parents have a grave responsibility to give good examples to their children. . . Parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. . . Family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one's life... This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.⁴²

It is important to note that the catechism's emphasis on the importance of parents as the first evangelizers of their children did not appear out of thin air or materialize as a result of the crisis of disaffiliation that currently faces the Church. The deposit of sacred scripture, along with the history of catechesis in the early Church, the evolution of catechetical best practice, and the teachings of the church fathers throughout the modern era point to the family as critical to fostering a life lived fully in Christ. It is from these four sources that the catechism can defend the statement that "Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith."⁴³

⁴¹ Bartkus and Smith, 48-49.

⁴²*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 863.

⁴³ CCC, 863.

The importance of the familial bond is woven throughout the Bible, from Genesis with the first family as the reflection of the Triune God to the book of Revelation that recounts the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb (Rev 21:2, 9).⁴⁴ In the book of Genesis the human couple is presented as a reflection of the Trinity as the two become one flesh. “The man shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.”⁴⁵ The very word ‘to be joined’ or ‘to cleave’, in the original Hebrew, bespeaks a profound harmony. . . The result of this union is that the two ‘become one flesh’, both physically and in the union of their hearts and lives, and, eventually, in a child, who will share not only genetically but also spiritually in the ‘flesh’ of both parents.”⁴⁶ The man, woman, and the children become a communion of persons in the image of the union of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷

Later in the Hebrew scriptures, the primacy of the family as the main transmitter of the faith is further cemented in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The book of Deuteronomy, which is the 5th book of the Torah and the capstone of Pentateuch,⁴⁸ gives a “blueprint” for how the ancient Israelites were to form their children in the faith:

Hear, O Israel!* The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your

⁴⁴ Francis, “*Amoris Lætitia*” Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vatican Website, March 19, 2016 http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_2016_0319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf, sec. 8.

⁴⁵ Gen 2:24.

⁴⁶ Francis, AL, sec. 13.

⁴⁷ Francis, “AL, sec. 29.

⁴⁸ Harris, Steven L. *Understanding the Bible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000)

gates.⁴⁹

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is the basis of what is known as the *Shema*. The *Shema* is one of only two prayers that are specifically commanded in Torah (the other is Birkat Ha-Mazon -- grace after meals). It is the oldest fixed daily prayer in Judaism, recited morning and night since ancient times. Traditional prayer books also include a Bedtime Shema, a series of passages including the Shema to be read at home before going to bed at night.⁵⁰ The Shema is essentially the Jewish child's bedtime prayer, but more importantly, it lays out the foundation of effective spiritual formation for each generation of God's people, the Israelites.⁵¹ Within this foundational prayer all four characteristics of households that effectively transmit the faith can be found. Broken apart each phrase gives instruction to parents for how to raise their children as faithful to Yahweh in the midst of a culture not their own. The first phrase, "*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!*" is an undeniable reference point. There is one God and there is no other. This is seen as the first step of faith and the foundational truth to pass onto children.⁵² It is the motivating narrative.

The second phrase of the Shema is "*Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today.*" This second phrase tells adults to love God with all their being.⁵³ Loving the Lord with all they have displays the characteristics of both motivating narrative and interpretation of religious commitment.

⁴⁹ Deut. 6:4-9.

⁵⁰ Judaism 101, "Shema." accessed 6 April 2020, <http://www.jewfaq.org/shemaref.htm>

⁵¹ Brian Haynes, *Shift: What It Takes to Finally Reach Families Today* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub. Inc., 2009),34.

⁵² Haynes, 35

⁵³ Haynes, 35

Parents became the model of what it means to be a faithful Jew in the midst of a culture that worships many gods.

The third phrase *“Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates”* is directing the ancient Israelites to pass down the faith with reflective intentionality⁵⁴ to fill their home with religious content by setting God’s word as a pendant on their foreheads and posting them on the doorposts of their houses and gates. The Israeli people, just like many Christians today, could not depend upon the culture in which they lived to help their children grow into a mature and deep relationship with Yaweh. Parents needed to make prayer and “God talk” an everyday occurrence, as frequent as eating, sleeping, and laboring in the fields.

The idea of parents as the foundational in the forming the faith of their children is also affirmed by the sages in the book of Proverbs where parents are called to discipline their children with love so that they follow the commands of the Lord and save them from ruin in Sheol: *“Do not withhold discipline from youths; if you beat them with the rod, they will not die. Beat them with the rod, and you will save them from Sheol. My son, if your heart is wise, my heart also will rejoice; And my inmost being will exult, when your lips speak what is right.”*⁵⁵ And while within a modern context beating children with a rod is not an effective way to transmit the faith, for the people of ancient Israel this imagery conveyed the seriousness of the responsibility of parents in training their children to follow Yaweh all the days of their lives.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Haynes, 36

⁵⁵ Proverbs 23:13-16.

⁵⁶ Francis, AL, sec. 17.

Within the context of the Christian scriptures the importance of family in transmitting faith is supported in both the Gospels and the epistles written to the early Christian communities. In the Gospels, Jesus himself is born into a family⁵⁷ and it is within the context of the family that Jesus is formed for his mission to the world. The Gospel of Luke paints a vivid portrait of Jesus' family life in recounting the incident of Jesus being lost and then found by his parents in the temple at the age of twelve: "He went down with them (Mary and Joseph) and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart and Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man."⁵⁸ Since the Gospel accounts of both Matthew and Luke depict Mary and Joseph as faithful Jews it is reasonable to assume they followed the "blueprint" given in the Shema and that it was through their guidance that Jesus, a child like all children in every way except sin, grew in wisdom before God and man by seeing his parents model what it meant to be a faithful Jew. It was within the context of his home that he matured into adulthood and became aware of who he was and what he was called to do.

In addition to holding up the Holy Family as the model of effective faith transmission, the authors of the New Testament epistles speak of "churches that meet in homes" (cf. 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5; Col 4:15; Philem 2). A family's living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table.⁵⁹ In the earliest days of the Church it was home that was the gathering place for worship and in sharing the Body of Christ. The home was where the seeds of faith were planted and it was from the home that Christianity spread within neighborhoods, cities, regions,

⁵⁷ Francis, AL, sec. 21.

⁵⁸ LK 2:51-52.

⁵⁹ Francis, AL, 15.

and ultimately, the entire world. It was from the domestic church that the entire Church People of God flowed.

Given that scripture clearly paints a picture of the early church that is rooted in the home, how is it that the classroom model, and not family catechesis has largely become standard practice in most parishes? Why are so many parents either unaware or intimidated by their role as the first and foremost evangelizers of their children, and therefore hesitant to engage with their children in authentic conversations of the faith? The answer lies in the history of the evolution of catechesis within the Catholic Church.

The Biblically rooted tradition of children being formed predominantly in the home continued largely into the middle ages. Although instruction was informal it reflected the life of the family. Children learned how to be faithful from their parents.⁶⁰ It wasn't until the 1600's that children started to come together at the local parish by grade level for instruction. The "formula" of catechesis was simple: the catechist explained the text and put forth the "correct" question and answer. For the first time the center of religious instruction began to shift from the home to the church. The change in catechetical methods was a reflection of the change in all forms of education that was brought on by the age of enlightenment. It was during the age of enlightenment that religion became more a matter of the intellect and less of the heart. Catechisms, books with questions with the right answers, became very popular. Memorization and not understanding were what marked success⁶¹ and parents we ushered into the background to make room for "professional" religious instruction.⁶²

⁶⁰ Baumbach, Gerard F. *The Way of Catechesis: Exploring Our History, Renewing Our Ministry* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2017), 139.

⁶¹ Baumbach, 165-167.

⁶² Baumbach, 165

It wasn't until the second half of the 19th century that the "question and answer" method of catechesis began to be criticized more publicly by members of the institutional church. Jesuit reformer Fr. Johannes Hofinger, who was instrumental in bringing about the conditions that would make way for the reforms of Vatican II, said that while current catechetical methods excelled in faithful concern for correct doctrine, they neglected basic child psychology. Basic child psychology attests to the fact that it is the parents who are the most instrumental in shaping their child's personality and moral development in the critical ages of 0-9 years of age. The adults in their lives are the single most motivating factor of the decisions they make.⁶³ Reformers like Hofinger, wanted to make religious instruction centered on the liturgy and the believing community and more related to daily life, which for most children is centered in the home.⁶⁴

Hofinger's zeal for making faith a lived experience manifested itself in the international Catechetical study weeks which examined the four fold presentation of the faith: liturgy, systematic teaching, Bible, and the testimony of Christian lives. The study weeks which took place 1957-1968 freed catechetical work from merely an intellectual activity. The study weeks championed a Kerygmatic approach. The study weeks stressed that the reality of people's lives is fundamental for welcoming the good news. The participants of the study weeks challenged church leadership to consider the influence of the environment on the individual and insisted that the catechist's own formation was key in making them a herald for Christ.

Both research and common sense attests to the fact that the most influential environment for children is the home and the formation of their first catechists, their parents, is key. In breathing new life into the importance of lived experience, the catechetical study weeks which

⁶³ Mcleod, Saul. "Simply Psychology," Kohlberg- Moral Development (Simply Psychology, January 3, 2014), <https://www.simplypsychology.org/>).

⁶⁴ Baumbach, 180-183.

occurred before, during, and after Vatican II opened the door to various catechetical perspectives that had either been previously oppressed or discouraged.⁶⁵ It is important to note that the “new” perspectives and the “evolution” of catechetical best practice was not a line but a circle as the church returned to practices common in the early Christian communities. Among these “renewed perspectives” were whole community catechesis and family catechesis, thereby, restoring and affirming the importance of the domestic church in building up the Body of Christ.

Lumen Gentium, the dogmatic constitution on the Church produced during Vatican II, speaks strongly to the importance of the domestic church in forming disciples of Christ: “From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.”⁶⁶

This view of parents as the first preachers or evangelizers of their children is further supported in the *Declaration on Christian Education*, which was produced at Vatican II one year after *Lumen Gentium* was promulgated. *The Declaration on Christian Education* not only affirms parents as the primary educators of their children but stresses that their influence is irreplaceable,

This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love

⁶⁵ Baumbach, 189-191.

⁶⁶ Vatican II, “*Lumen Gentium*,” November 21, 1964,” Vatican Website, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, sec. 13.

and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbor. Here, too, they find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church. Finally, it is through the family that they are gradually led to a companionship with their fellowmen and with the people of God. Let parents, then, recognize the inestimable importance a truly Christian family has for the life and progress of God's own people.⁶⁷

In other words, it is within the domestic church that children learn how to BE church and no other program or environment can replace it, because it is watching their parents love the Lord that children learn how to live out their baptism, worship in community, and become followers of Jesus. This basic truth should come as no surprise as it rests solidly the revelation of God's plan for the family in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

The documents produced by Vatican II ushered in changes worldwide in every area of Church life, and catechesis in the United States was no exception. Up until the 1960's catechesis in the United States was dominated by the Baltimore Catechism.⁶⁸ Quite suddenly, the old question and answer method of catechesis began to be modified if not completely abandoned. With emphasis on Church People of God, family emerged as a strong theme⁶⁹ Vatican II's declaration of parents being the primary educators of their children was shocking not only to

⁶⁷ Vatican II, "*Gravissimum Educationis*" Vatican website, October 28, 1965. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html sec. 3.

⁶⁸ Baumbach, 191.

⁶⁹ Murphy, Karen. "Family-Centered Catechesis: A Perspective." Chicago Studies, 21

families but to some pastors and parish communities. As in the early days of the church, religious education began to be more than only the education of children. Adults began to be viewed as learners in their own right who have great influence in the lives of their children. In the years that followed programs aimed at the families, such as Family Parish Religious Education first published by Paulist Press and Family Learning Teams (FLT) developed by Joseph and Mercedes Iannoe became prevalent.⁷⁰

These family programs were produced in tandem with church documents such as *Sharing the Light of Faith: National Directory for Catholics of the United States* and *Catechesi Tradendae*. *Sharing the the Light of Faith* which was produced by the USCCB in 1979 and like *Declaration on Christian Education* it referred to the family as the domestic church and called the family to live in a communion of persons that evangelize each other with intention: “In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, they themselves receive the same Gospel message as deeply lived by them.⁷¹” Like the image of the first family as a mutually self-giving communion of persons in the book of Genesis, the modern family is called to share the Gospel so each can have life and have it abundantly.

The same year that the USCCB produced *Sharing the Light of Faith*, St. Pope John Paul II made family a major concern in his apostolic exhortation, *Catechesis Tradendae* :

The family's catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. This special character has been rightly stressed by the Church. . . Education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children's tenderest age. . is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which

⁷⁰ Murphy, 22.

⁷¹ Murphy, 18.

perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. This catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, a bereavement) care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events. But that is not enough: Christian parents must strive to follow and repeat, within the setting of family life, the more methodical teaching received elsewhere. The fact that these truths about the main questions of faith and Christian living are thus repeated within a family setting impregnated with love and respect will often make it possible to influence the children in a decisive way for life... The church of the home remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis. Thus there cannot be too great an effort on the part of Christian parents to prepare for this ministry of being their own children's catechists and to carry it out with tireless zeal. Encouragement must also be given to the individuals or institutions that, through person-to-person contacts, through meetings, and through all kinds of pedagogical means, help parents to perform their task: The service they are doing to catechesis is beyond price.⁷²

In *Catechesi Tradendae*, St. Pope John Paul II identifies the four components of a family where the faith is effectively transmitted. The foundational beliefs that parents establish from the earliest days of their marriage is the motivating narrative. This motivating narrative is strengthened when the believing community provides support to parents as evangelizers. Reflection intentionality is seen when care is taken to teach children the faith and parents use “*methodical teachings*” to raise their children. Religious content and interpretation of religious

⁷² John Paul II, “Catechesi Tradendae.” Vatican Website, October 16, 1979. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html sec. 68.

commitment are present when parents translate the religious significance of the sacraments and community life within the home both explicitly and within the context of their day to day lives within their home.

Despite continued support by the teaching office of the Church for the idea of family catechesis, family programs began to wane in the 1980 and 1990's. The reasons for this are complex, but one factor is that "old habits die hard" and some parents and church leaders never felt comfortable with the family approach because they still identified with the question and answer model of the Baltimore catechism that dominated the Catholic Church for generations. In addition, family life was less stable due to an increase in the number of divorce and single parent households in the United States, which made ministering to the whole family challenging.

⁷³ All of these factors, along with concern expressed by some that family catechesis was watered down and did not adequately teach knowledge of the faith such as correct doctrine and basic prayers as effectively as the classroom model, led many parishes to revert back to traditional religious education classes which focused on children and were led by a ministry representative or lay catechist.

For example, within the Diocese of Green Bay, where I serve, family catechesis has had various starts and stops. Following Vatican II, like many dioceses in the United States, the Green Bay Diocese began to experiment with a family approach to religious education. The Green Bay Plan, which was a comprehensive faith formation approach for families was implemented in 1975. The plan was followed by other family faith formation models over the years that included nationally recognized programs such as Fashioning Faith (1978), and programs developed by individual parishes such as St. Mary's of the Angels Family Program

⁷³ Murphy 24-25.

(1990). More recently tried family faith formation models piloted in the Green Bay Diocese include Generations of Faith (2001) created by John Roberto and Whole Community Catechesis, which finds its genesis in the book by the same name written by Bill Huebsc in 2010.⁷⁴ It is worth noting that both of these programs are intergenerational models of faith formation as opposed to exclusively family catechesis. In the intergenerational model, parishioners of every age group meet together to be formed in the faith, rather than a purely family centered faith formation model which focuses on forming parents as the first evangelizers of their children.⁷⁵

Despite such a strong history of family catechesis in the Green Bay Diocese many of the family programs that had been implemented at various parishes in the Diocese since Vatican II faded away over time. The reasons for this are related to the challenges already identified when implementing family catechesis, particularly the breakdown of the family and the concerns over the viability of family catechesis in adequately being able to teach the knowledge of the faith. Although family and intergenerational programs such as Generations of Faith were judged by the Diocesan task force on education as an excellent way to involve the family in social, catechetical, and parish life, they were not judged to meet the standards as far content and number of required hours of religious instruction for children.⁷⁶ When I became the coordinator of religious education at St. Raphael in 2013 most parishes in the diocese, including my own, utilized a traditional classroom model where, although parents may be invited to a few class

⁷⁴ Mary Sedlacek, email to author, March 26, 2020.

Mary Sedlacek was the Administrator of Faith Formation for St. Mary of the Angels Parish, Green Bay. She also served the Diocese of Green Bay in a variety of ways including Chairperson of Diocesan Education Environment Committee (2008-2015), Family Life Advisory Committee(2009-2015) and as prayer and environment coordinator for Office of Evangelization & Discipleship(2010-2015).

⁷⁵ Murphy, 23.

⁷⁶ Diocese of Green Bay Office of Children and Youth Faith Formation. "Frequently Asked Questions about the K-8 Religious Education Textbook List." PDF file. April 2, 2013.
https://www.gbdioc.org/images/stories/Resource_Site/Education/Documents/FAQs-About-Textbook-List.pdf

sessions or to attend Mass with their children, it was the children and not the parents or family unit, who were the primary focus of the catechesis.

However, despite questions regarding the methodology of forming families in the faith, the undeniable reality of the importance of parents in the formation of their children is a truth that cannot be denied. As we have clearly seen, scripture, the weight of church teaching, the history of catechesis in the early Church, the development of catechesis over time, and the current research on the state of disaffiliation within the Catholic Church combined with the data of what leads to the effective transmission of the faith supports that the parents as leaders of the domestic church must be formed in the faith in order to effectively transmit the Gospel to their children. Family catechesis in its fully realized form is more than just a parent night here or there, inviting families to prayer experiences, or an ice cream social at the end of the year, although none of the experiences mentioned are bad in and of themselves. However, it is important not to confuse those experiences with whole family catechesis. Family faith formation is a “flipped” model of catechesis which places the parents at the top of the parishes’ formation programs rather than the children. The vision is that if the parish devotes resources to forming the family influencers, it can be far more helpful for the children. Under the family faith formation model, the parish’s role becomes one of equipping (not replacing) the children’s primary catechists at home. The focus shifts from providing catechists in classrooms to helping parents succeed at being the religious educators to their children that they already are by virtue of their call to the vocation of marriage and family life.⁷⁷

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis stressed and affirmed the importance of not only the family in raising children in the faith, but in pastors and other

⁷⁷ Beaumont, “Catechetical Leadership.”

catechetical leaders within the church in making sure parents are formed as the first evangelizers of their children:

Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith. . .Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek him and sense their need for him, for only in this way does “one generation laud your works to another, and declare your mighty acts” (Ps 144:4) and “fathers make known to children your faithfulness” (Is 38:19). . .For this reason, “couples and parents should be properly appreciated as active agents in catechesis. . . The family is thus an agent of pastoral activity through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness. . . All of us should be able to say, thanks to the experience of our life in the family: “We come to believe in the love that God has for us” (1 Jn 4:16). Only on the basis of this experience will the Church’s pastoral care for families enable them to be both domestic churches and a leaven of evangelization in society⁷⁸

From a pastoral standpoint, when considering family catechesis as a faith formation model, it can be generally agreed upon that parish life differs greatly depending upon the community which the parish serves. Even within the same city, parishes may have radically different cultures, socioeconomic populations, and age demographics. Given the great diversity in parish life, it should come as no surprise that just as parishes differ, there are a wide variety of family catechesis models being implemented in parishes throughout the United States, including within the Green Bay Diocese. Some of the parishes utilizing family catechesis in our diocese include St. Thomas More and St. Therese in Appleton, St. Matthew in Green Bay, Resurrection Parish in De Pere, and St. Katherine Drexel in Kaukauna. Among these parishes family

⁷⁸ Francis, AL, sec. 287-289.

catechesis takes a great many forms and as we have already noted, due to differing opinions of what constitutes true family catechesis, the Green Bay Diocese does not keep track of how many parishes overall include family catechesis as part of their faith formation program.⁷⁹

In truth, while family catechesis models vary in length, format and structure, all family catechesis models that place forming parents as the primary focus of their mission share the same basic vision and foundational characteristics. Beyond the basic vision of strengthening, equipping, and supporting parents as the primary catechists of their children, there are four additional characteristics that are important to note foundational to family catechesis: It is lifelong and intergenerational, event and community centered, a partnership between parents and church leadership, and it integrates catholic culture into the home, not just during class or Sunday Mass.⁸⁰

In regards to family catechesis being lifelong and intergenerational, family catechesis recognizes that growing in faith is a journey that is never completed. It is not just for children, it is for everyone.⁸¹ Secondly, growing in the faith is a communal activity not just within the family, but between the family and the communities to which they belong. St. Pope John Paul II spoke to this in his apostolic exhortation entitled *Familiaris Consortio*. The family is seen as an “authentic and mature communion between persons” that is “the first and irreplaceable school of social life, and example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love...the family is. . .the place of origin and the most effective

⁷⁹ Maximus Cabey, email to author, March 30, 2020. Maximus Cabey is the Director of Religious Education and Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Green Bay (2017-present).

⁸⁰ Kehrwald, Leif. *Families & Faith: a Vision & Practice for Parish Leaders*. New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2006, 2-4.

⁸¹ It is important to note the differentiation between family catechesis and intergenerational or whole community catechesis. Although family catechesis involves the community, its main focus is forming parents as the primary catechists of their children. The focus of whole community catechesis does not focus on the family unit, but on the community as a whole.

means for humanizing and personalizing society. . . As the Second Vatican Council states, in the family the various generations come together and help one another to grow wiser and to harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social living."⁸² By its very nature, family catechesis is meant to make faith a day to day lived reality and not just a class that you take once a week that has no relevance to day to day life.

The third characteristic is that family catechesis is a partnership between parents and church leadership. The danger of the structure of the classroom model is that it has a tendency to foster passive parent posture where parents drop off their children to be made into disciples by the “experts.” However, as research clearly shows, this model of discipleship doesn’t seem to be working. In family catechesis parents are shifted from ministerial objects to partners. As a communion of persons, each family is recognized by the church as a day to day expression of what it means to be church.⁸³ Ideally, by partnering with parish leadership as representatives of the larger faith community, parents can form their homes into schools of discipleship.

It is forming schools of discipleship that the fourth characteristic, integrating Catholic Culture into family life beyond Sunday Mass and faith formation class, is key. The family, not the four walls of the church, become the center of religious activity. Family prayer, frequent “God talk”, reading sacred texts, works of mercy, and celebrations of significant holy days and seasons of the Church are all ways to build Catholic culture in the home in an authentic and intentional way.⁸⁴ An earmark of family catechesis is that it provides resources, encouragement, and support by empowering parents to make their homes into schools of discipleship.

⁸² John Paul II, “*Familiaris Consortio*,” encyclical letter, Vatican website, Nov. 22, 1981, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html, sec. 43.

⁸³ Kerwald, 2-3.

⁸⁴ Kerwald, 4.

When one reflects on the vision and characteristics of family catechesis, it becomes clear the family catechesis model has the potential to address some of the key factors that lead to disaffiliation. By its very nature it seems most advantageously situated to address the pastoral concerns in regards to the archetype of drifter. As a group, drifters often disaffiliate from the church because they see very little connection between being Catholic and their day to day lives. In short, they don't know why being Catholic matters. Drifters are also characterized by coming from families where parents either struggle with explaining why their faith matters to them or who give faith nominal importance within the life of the family. One of the earmarks of family catechesis is that it seeks to empower parents to be their child's first evangelizer and that it supports the building of Catholic culture within the home where being Catholic extends beyond Sunday Mass or once a week faith formation classes.

It is also worth noting that family catechesis has the potential to address some of the unique factors that exist on the macro level that lead Catholics to disaffiliate from the Church. The fact that family catechesis is envisioned as community centered helps create a network of faith filled parents and draws families into the communal life of the church, including worship. In addition the loss of respect for institutional leadership, especially the church hierarchy is addressed by focusing on creating a true and equal partnership between parents and church leadership.

Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, the vision of family catechesis attempts to bring healing to the widespread destabilization of family life. Families are supported and strengthened when provided with the tools to process difficult and painful experiences through the lens of faith. In addition, it counteracts the trend to let children "choose" their faith at some later date by empowering and encouraging parents to create a catholic culture in the home where faith is an everyday lived experience and not just an occasional event. Rather than church

being a place that they go, the family itself becomes church in the truest sense of the word by living a daily life that is a true expression of faith and an ecclesial communion of persons.⁸⁵

In addition to simply counteracting the influences that lead to disaffiliation, family catechesis by its very vision and structure has the potential to strengthen the four components that lead to the effective transmission of the faith within the home, and as a result not only reach out to families on the margins, but also to strengthen, support, and encourage spiritual growth in families at all levels of faith development, not just those on the brink of disaffiliation. Because family catechesis is a “flipped” model that focuses on adult faith formation, it allows parents the time and space to reflect upon and nurture their own unique, personal faith narrative that they can pass onto their children. Furthermore, by giving parents access to background knowledge, faith formation resources, and information on best practices in regards to child faith development, and the time and space essential for them to discuss forming their children in the faith with parish leadership and other parents, family catechesis supports parents in developing reflective intentionality in their homes.

In addition, because family catechesis is event and community centered, it naturally integrates families into the community life of the church, which places faith at the center of family life rather than on the edges. Essentially, it forms parents in creating a catholic culture in the home where sacramentals, the reading of scripture, conversations about faith, and the observation of the liturgical seasons of the church are part of day to day life. Finally, by emphasizing parents as the primary catechists and first evangelizers of their children, it makes the parents the driving force of the faith formation of their children rather than passive observers. Children see their parents as witnesses sharing the faith with them, and as a result, realize the importance faith has in the lives of their parents, which effectively introduces the fourth

⁸⁵ Kehrwald, 3.

component of effective transmission of the Catholic faith, interpretation of religious commitment, into the home.

While the vision and structure has the potential to actively engage families in the practice of their faith, it is important for parish leaders to note that there are three very significant concerns to be aware of when considering implementing a family catechesis model. The first is the family catechesis model starts with the assumption that parents will willingly take on the role of putting the time, effort, and energy into teaching their children at home. As the data clearly shows, many millennial parents do not see their faith as a priority⁸⁶ and, therefore, may hesitate, if not refuse, to participate in a faith formation model where the highest emphasis is put on faith formation in the home. Secondly, the concern of accountability has been raised. The concern centers around the belief that parents will “use” family catechesis as a means to get out of classroom requirements and that there is no pastorally viable way to hold families accountable since faith formation takes place in the home outside of the church walls.

The third concern involves one of the most significant causes of disaffiliation and that is the destabilization of family life. By its very name, family catechesis may carry negative connotations for those who come from broken or dysfunctional homes. According to the CDC, about 50% of marriages in the United States end in divorce.⁸⁷ A quarter of American Catholic adults have been divorced themselves, and roughly a third are currently remarried.⁸⁸ This “silent schism” disrupts the domestic church and it also can cause a second schism between the child and faith community dependent on how welcoming and sensitive to the community is the issue

⁸⁶ Beaumont, “Catechetical Leadership.”

⁸⁷ MD Bramlett and WD Mosher, “Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States.” vol. 23 (Vital Health Statistics, 2002), pp. 1-93)

⁸⁸ Lipka, Michael. “*Most U.S. Catholics Hope for Change in Church Rule on Divorce, Communion.*” Pew Research Center, October 26, 2015. (Accessed September 14, 2019) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/26/most-u-s-catholics-hope-for-change-in-church-rule-on-divorce-communion>.

of divorce.⁸⁹ Many children are raised in homes where the idea of family carries negative or emotional baggage or they live at multiple households who may be at different levels of faith development. Any program that labels itself family catechesis would need to be aware the word family can vary vastly in meaning from one family to the next.

In addition, complications arise in households where one parent is deeply committed to the Catholic faith and the other is a nominal Catholic or even hostile to the church. In those situations, effective transmission of the faith would be challenging as children would see two very different interpretations of the importance of faith in family life, rendering the vision of family catechesis an uphill battle at best and an all out war at worst, pitting one parent against the other and leading to anxiety, confusion, and emotional “injury” that encompasses their faith life and impacts their relationship with Christ and the Church.

In my role as coordinator of religious education at St. Raphael Parish, I am uniquely situated to witness the many ways in which youth and families drift away from the Church and the components that are present in families where faith is central to family life. I have also accompanied families where there is either a great deal of conflict present in the home because of discord between the parents in regards to the importance of the faith in the everyday life of the family or where children are shuttled between two very different households: one where faith is of central importance and one where the practice of the Catholic faith is forbidden.

Before I read the immense amount of research done on disaffiliation and effective transmission of the faith, I observed the trends and patterns found in both the *Going Going Gone Survey* and the *Report on American Religious Parenting* in “real time.” In other words, the concerns that drove the researchers of both projects were concerns I shared based on my 7 years of ministry to youth and families as the coordinator of religious education at St. Raphael, a parish

⁸⁹ Marquardt, Elizabeth, Amy Zietlow, and Charles Stokes, “Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith”(New York, NY: Institute for American Values, 2013), 23-30.

with over 2,800 registered families, all at different levels of faith development. What I, and other members of our team have observed is that the numbers of families and youth in our faith formation program is on a slow and steady decline.⁹⁰ Additionally, we have noticed a drop in the number of children and youth receiving the sacraments of baptism, First Eucharist, and Confirmation.⁹¹ Discovering where the families are going, and discerning how we can reach out to them before they are gone forever is of great concern to our community.

It was this in mind, that our faith formation team, which is comprised of three grade level coordinators, a youth minister, an administrative assistant, our pastor, and the parochial vicar, first began to investigate the possibility of implementing a family catechesis model at St. Raphael as an alternative, not a replacement, to “traditional” hour long weekly classes for youth. Families would have the choice to either continue with traditional classes or to participate in family catechesis. By making family catechesis a choice, we hoped to meet two goals. The first is that we believed that if families were given a choice, rather than being “forced” into a family faith formation model, that we would be able to countermand the concern that parents would refuse to participate, rendering the program ineffective. The second goal was that those who did participate would grow together in faith and want to share that Good News with others. As in the early church, their enthusiasm for their life in Christ would spread to other families in the St. Raphael community and draw them to choose family catechesis for their own domestic church.

Beginning in January 2019, our team met on five separate occasions to discern if family catechesis was a good fit for St. Raphael, and if so determine what structure it should take. We developed guiding questions to help focus our discussion.⁹² We also tasked the Youth Education Commission, a committee of six parishioners which is comprised of a mix of parents

⁹⁰ Appendix 1

⁹¹ Appendix 2

⁹² Appendix 3

with school aged children, catechists, and educators, with conducting phone interviews⁹³ of parishes in the area who were already utilizing a family catechesis model. By interviewing other parishes we were able to gather information on what was already being offered in our diocese and what successes and challenges other parishes experienced when implementing family catechesis. We were then able to use this data to help inform our discussions.

After much prayer, conversation, deliberation, and some sleepless nights, we developed a structure we believed would work for our parish, entitled Families of Faith (FOF)⁹⁴

The goals for families of faith are as follows:

- 1) Strengthen and facilitate development of the motivating narrative of parents so that they grow as witnesses of the faith in the lives of their children.
- 2) Equip parents as the primary evangelizers of their children through providing both resources to create a catholic culture in the home and opportunities to practice reflective intentionality
- 3) Connect families to the community and liturgical life of the church.
- 4) Strengthen the partnership between families and church leadership.

Within each of these goals the components that help lead to the effective transmission of faith are explicitly stated. The factors that lead youth and families to drift are also addressed within the structure of the program. The table below details how each goal is aligned to address factors that cause youth and families to drift from the Catholic Church:

Goal	Causes for disaffiliation
Strengthen and facilitate development of the motivating narrative of parents so that they grow as witnesses of the faith in the lives of their children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parents struggle to explain why faith is important ● Lack of mentors in in faith journey ● Faith has no relevance in day to day life of the family ● Lack of sense of Catholic of identity ● Destabilization of family life
Equip parents as the primary catechists of their children through providing resources to create a catholic culture in the home and providing	

⁹³ Appendix 4

⁹⁴ Appendix 5

opportunities to practice reflective intentionality.	
Connect families to the community and liturgical life of the church.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Loss of community and social relationships
Strengthen the partnership between families and church leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Loss of respect for institutional leadership

The structure and format of the program integrates the core elements of family catechesis but is designed with the needs of our families in mind. We discerned these needs both by gathering feedback from young families during the planning process and by reflecting upon our observations of families at St. Raphael throughout the course of our collective ministry experience.

In brief, Families of Faith meets once a month from August-May. Each session is two hours in length. During that time families gather for shared prayer, an ice breaker, and food. . After the brief fellowship, parents and children attend break out groups. During the break out sessions children are introduced to the topic of the month by volunteer catechists with their same aged peers. Parents receive formation to help them both develop their motivating narrative and prepare to teach their children at home the other three weeks of the month. Integrated into the program are opportunities for parents to reflect on best practice and for families to participate in acts of service together and build a Catholic Culture in the home. We decided to utilize a text book series offered by Sophia Press called *A Family of Faith*⁹⁵ as our curriculum since it utilizes one parent guide as a resource for families that provides lessons that can be adjusted for all children grades PK-8, making it easier for families of all age ranges and sizes to work together. As a means of catechesis we found the resources provided by Sophia Press to be very rich and

⁹⁵ A Family of Faith: Catechesis for the Whole Family,” Sophia Institute for Teachers, (accessed January 17, 2020), <https://sophiainstituteforteachers.org/shop/family-of-faith>.

firmly rooted in Church teaching. By utilizing this resource we hoped to countermand the concern that family catechesis is watered down and an inadequate means to teach the knowledge of the faith. However, since no premade program, no matter how rich, can entirely meet the needs of individual parishes, the resources provided by Sophia Press serve as a springboard, not a foundation, for our ministry to youth and families.

Once we had established the basic structure of the program, we created an implementation timeline which details ⁹⁶ action steps, resources needed, point persons, and both quantitative and qualitative metrics and assessments. This timeline proposed rolling out the program to families in April 2019 with the program start date being August, 2019.

Assessments to determine the impact of the program include a parent survey⁹⁷ that is given in August, December, and May in order to discern how, if at all, the program strengthens the components that lead to effective transmission of the faith and therefore, address the factors that lead to youth and families to drift away from the church. In addition, parents complete monthly reflections⁹⁸ which provide qualitative data. The final assessment piece is a cumulative family storybook (scrapbook) where families reflect upon their journey and how they have grown together in faith.

Although at the time of the writing of this paper, the cumulative storybooks and the final parent survey have not been completed, and therefore cannot be evaluated, we do have some preliminary data, both qualitative and quantitative that has helped our team to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in the short term and adjust the program in a timely fashion to better meet the needs of families and partner with parents as the first evangelizers of their children. In regards to the quantitative data, comparative parent survey results between

⁹⁶ Appendix 6

⁹⁷ Appendix 7

⁹⁸ Appendix 8

September and December⁹⁹ show an increase in the percentage of practices within the home that will help strengthen the four components of effective transmission of the faith. For example, in regards to reading the Bible together as a family, which not only introduces religious content into the home but shows an increase of interpretation of religious commitment, the initial survey in September reported that 4% of families read the Bible together weekly and 0% read it together daily. The December survey results indicated that 15% of families read the Bible together weekly and 5% read it daily. Furthermore, in regards to the motivating narrative of parents the data gathered in September indicated 33% of parents said they prayed on their own on a regular basis and in December 47% of parents said they prayed on their own on a regular basis.

It should be noted that the number of respondents in December was lower than the number in September. There are two notable reasons for this difference. The first is that on the day the survey was given there were six families absent due to vacations and illness. The second is that between September and December four families dropped out of the program. One family dropped out due to a geographical move and the other three due to challenging family dynamics associated with divorce. In these three cases the children were not always with the parent who supported faith formation. This event highlights a concern of family catechesis. How do you address broken homes which are a lived reality for so many children? The question of how to best minister to families with challenging dynamics opens up new areas of analysis in regards to family catechesis at St. Raphael.

However, despite the unanswered questions, I believe that when one looks at the quantitative data gathered from comparing the September and December parent surveys side by side with the qualitative data gathered from the monthly reflection sheets, an argument can be made that family catechesis is helping to develop and strengthen the components that lead the

⁹⁹ Appendix 9

effective transmission of the faith and as a result, the entire Body of Christ. Although individual responses in the reflection sheets varied, there were trends in the responses in regards to each of the four components. In the area of motivating narrative many parents commented on seeing a change in motivation in themselves and/or their spouses as they developed their “faith story” through working with their children. This was most powerfully exemplified by one mother in particular who commented in September that her husband would not join in their discussion at all, “John¹⁰⁰ sat at the counter and we sat at the table. He was not part of the group. I lead the whole thing and he joins in when he wants. We are working through this.” Three months later she noted, “We always grow and feel the closest when we sit down and do the activities together. John is a huge piece of this, he knows a lot about the Bible and we learn a lot from him.. . there has been a change. He joins us on his own now with no prompting.”

In regards to reflective intentionality, the word most used in the reflections sheets was “time.” Parents consistently commented that the structure of family catechesis allowed their family to spend more time together intentionally focusing on and sharing their faith with each other. One mother of middle school youth explained, “Being parents of teenagers we had to intentionally set aside time. We decided to get together before bedtime and read one chapter (of the Gospel of Luke) a night. It was heartfelt to see the family Bible being passed around and opened and read as we all gathered. We would like to continue to gather nightly to come together and intentionally be present in each other’s lives.” Another parent commented, “We focused on making prayer before meals a priority. Actually, praying at other times increased as well.” There were many similar responses made by parents in regards to simply having more time to be together. Clearly, by making the home the primary place where children are formed

¹⁰⁰ Name changed to protect privacy.

in the faith, family catechesis provides a natural environment for parents to reflect on and set time aside for effectively transmitting their faith to their children.

The third component of effective faith transmission, religious content, involves the “what” of effective faith transmission through religious experiences and practices that parents expose their children to. Religious content is built explicitly into the program through the use of Sophia Press’ *A Family of Faith* curriculum and the integration of either a service project or a pilgrimage. However it is completely up to parents on how they utilize the resources provided. The trend in the reflection sheets indicated that parents took advantage of the resources provided not only by Sophia Press, but by the parish. After we provided families with Advent Wreath kits, a majority of families commented on lighting an Advent Wreath in their home for the first time and praying Advent prayers together daily. Another parent wrote, “We went to Holy Hill and it was a very religious experience.” The religious experiences that find their genesis in family catechesis help to increase the religiously significant content in the home, thus strengthening the likelihood of effective religious transmission.

Finally, the reflection sheets also paint a picture of how the component of interpretation of religious commitment is integrated into family catechesis. Many parents commented on having deep religious conversations that took place within the context of day to day family life, not just for the hour they attend Mass each week. One parent commented, “Learning together has helped us talk more about faith and grow together.” Another stated that their family “takes advantage of frequent car trips to talk about faith.” One father commented that they had started reading the Bible together every night before bed. By making faith as integral into family life as the daily commute, eating dinner, or the nightly bedtime routine, parents are sending a message about the importance of faith within the context of family life, which in turn increases the likelihood of effective faith transmission to their children.

Perhaps the most powerful indicator of the effectiveness of family catechesis thus far in that it combines both quantitative and qualitative results, are the short answer responses to the parent survey in December. In the December survey parents asked if they were to choose family catechesis again today, would they do so and what was the reason for their response. 65% of the respondents said they would choose it again next year, with 21% unsure.¹⁰¹ And while the reasons for saying yes varied, many commented on how they felt they were growing together as a family. This supports one of the key takeaways from the study done by the McGrath Institute on *American Religious Parenting*. The researchers noted that parents need to be informed in their role and empowered, but not intimidated. It is not about what they know, but about how they share what is precious to them, and families of faith allows them the opportunity to have those discussions.¹⁰²

An added benefit of collecting the monthly reflection sheets is that we have been able to make adjustments as needed, rather than waiting until the end of the year. One challenge mentioned by several parents in the monthly reflection sheets is that trying to work with children at different age levels is difficult for them to do at home. Another concern mentioned is how to make working together during the month a priority with busy schedules. In response, beginning in January, our team intentionally built in more time for parents to share strategies for how to work with their children who are at different developmental levels and for parents to share how they “carve” out time to integrate faith conversations and experiences into their everyday lives. This led to other conversations about “best practices” in working with their children at home. It is our hope that these adjustments will help empower parents while not overwhelming them.

Moving forward, our next steps are to continue to respond to feedback offered by families. In May we will conduct an end of year parent survey and make observational notes of

¹⁰¹ Appendix 10 (Families of Faith December Survey Comments)

¹⁰² Bartkus and Smith, 65-66.

the scrapbooks to note trends and to help us discern how to better help families grow together in faith. In addition, in the fall of 2020, we hope to survey 8th graders in the weekly classes as well as 8th graders who participated in family catechesis the previous year to try and judge if there is any difference in a tendency of disaffiliation between the two groups.

Another action step we plan on taking is challenging families currently in the program to invite another family at the parish to the end of the year family catechesis celebration with hopes this will spark excitement about family catechesis and draw families who may be “drifting” along the margins into relationship with Christ. This excitement is best exemplified by a parent who reflected in January, “We always grow and feel closest when we sit and go through the activities together. We love doing this!” It is that kind of enthusiasm and investment that can change the life of a child and make all the difference grounding them in their faith, a faith that can provide comfort and shelter in the storms of life. When a child is grounded in love, they are more likely to carry on the mission given to the Church by Jesus: to build God’s Kingdom of love on earth.

In 2015 Pope Francis spoke to what a powerful force family is in bringing God’s Kingdom of Love to the world at the World Meeting of Families:

God always knocks at the door of hearts. . . do you know what He likes best? To knock on the doors of families and find families that are united, to find families that love each other, to find the families that bring up their children and educate them and help them to keep going forward and that create a society of goodness, of truth, and of beauty.. . In families there is always, always, the cross. Always. Because the love of God, of the Son of God, also opened for us this path. But. . .there is the resurrection. . . Because of this, the family . . is a factory of hope, of hope of life and of resurrection . . . difficulties are overcome with love. . .Only

love is capable of overcoming difficulties. Love is a festival. Love is joy. Love is to keep moving forward.¹⁰³

There is no easy solution to the crisis of disaffiliation in the church. The difficulties and afflictions that diminish the body of Christ are complex and real but I believe, as St. Paul taught: “Affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.¹⁰⁴” Research has shown that there is hope to be found in family catechesis because it upholds, strengthens and supports the domestic church, which at the time of writing of the conclusion of this paper is even more critical than ever due to the COVID 19 pandemic where most parishes in the United States have been forced to close their doors. The domestic church is quite literally the only place of worship available to families and what was once only a theological construct to many has become a lived reality in every home. It is my belief that the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through the signs of the times, and we as Church are being invited to open our hearts and minds to what God is trying to reveal to us about the sacredness and holiness of the family and its importance in sustaining the health and vitality of the Body of Christ. It is my hope that once we emerge from this crisis we are able to utilize not only what we as church have experienced during COVID 19, but also the knowledge provided by current research on disaffiliation and effective faith transmission and the wisdom of sacred scripture, church teaching, and tradition to help foster each domestic church into the place where the next generation of disciples are transformed into the hands and feet of Jesus to a

¹⁰³ Arjonillo, Rolonda “Pope Francis Top 10 Quotes on the Family,” Catholics Striving for Holiness (Catholic Striving for Holiness , December 28, 2019), <https://www.catholicsstrivingforholiness.org/pope-francis-on-the-family-top-10-quotes-in-world-meeting-of-the-families/>).

¹⁰⁴ Romans 5:3-5.

hurting world as they follow in the footsteps of their parents who follow in the footsteps of the ONE who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

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