



NCCL

Parents & Families

AT THE CENTER OF **FAITH FORMATION**

Handout 1 *Family Research Guide*

The *Research Phase* of the Parents and Families at the Center of Faith Formation involves a **parent survey** and **parent listening sessions** – focus groups or interviews or both.

The Parent Survey is conducted online using SurveyMonkey. Each parish will receive a link to SurveyMonkey that can be shared with parents. The national project staff will produce a survey report for your parish that you can review and analyze. You will find the survey questions in the third section of this Guide.

The Listening Sessions – interviews and focus groups – are conducted locally in the parish. The goal is to develop a deeper understanding of the lives of families in your parish community—and their religious and spiritual needs and practices—that can form the basis of developing new initiatives. A parish team can choose to do parent interviews or parent focus groups or both. This Guide provides instructions on how to conduct interviews and focus groups.

Part 1. Parent Interviews

Goal

To interview 3-4 parents from each of the four age groups: parents of young children, parents of grade school children, parents of middle school young people, and parents of high school young people.

Tasks

1. Select, invite, and schedule parents for one-to-one interviews. Ask parents for at least 20 minutes for the interview. Invite 3-4 parents from each of the four age groups: parents of young children, parents of grade school children, parents of middle school young people, and parents of high school young people.
2. Assign one member of the team to interview each parent and take notes on the responses to the questions. Organize interviewers so that all of their interviews are with the same age group. This will make tabulating results easier.
3. Use the questions below to be used in all of the interviews. It is essential that all interviewers ask the same questions so that common answers can be identified across all of the interviews.
4. Conduct the interviews. Here is a sample introduction that can be adapted for your interviews:

Thank you for your positive response to our invitation to be interviewed as part of our research for new faith formation initiatives with parents and families. This conversation is an important element in our parish's desire to better serve parents and families. I am: (name). I'm one of the task force members. I have a few questions for ask you. During the interview I will be taking a few notes so that we can more accurately recall our conversation. While this information will inform our study, no names will be attached to any of this information.

5. Have each interviewer compile the interview notes into a report for each interview. This report will form the basis of developing a profile of all the interview responses.

Interview Questions

A 20 minute interview should provide time for 6-7 questions. Use the following questions so that every interviewer asks the same questions. (If you have time, you can ask the additional questions.)

Core Questions

1. What's the best thing about being a parent today?
2. What's the hardest thing about being a parent today?
3. What are the most important values you want to instill in your child/teen? How do you do this?
4. What are some of the ways you try to transmit the Catholic/Christian faith to your children/teens?
5. What are some of the things you do as a family (practices) to live your faith in everyday life?
6. What is one way your church can support you as a parent?
7. What is one way your church can help your family practice the faith?

Additional Questions

8. What would you say is one of your strengths as a parent of children/teens?
9. How are you trying to live your Catholic/Christian faith as an adult?
10. What's hard about raising your child/teen as a Catholic today?

2. Parent Focus Groups

Goal

To conduct at least four focus groups of up to 10 parents – one for each of the four age groups: parents of young children, parents of grade school children, parents of middle school young people, and parents of high school young people.

Tasks

An excellent way to gather information about parents is through focus groups. Organize at least one focus group for each age group: parents of young children, grade school children, middle school young people, and high school young people. Work to insure that there are at least 10-12 parents per focus group. Meet for 45 minutes. Select locations for each focus group. You can use a variety of locations to make it easy for parents to participate.

1. Organize at least one focus group for each of the four age groups: parents of young children, parents of grade school children, parents of middle school young people, and parents of high school young people.
2. Schedule the date and location for each focus group. Allow one hour for the focus group meeting.

3. Invite 10-12 parents – who reflect the diversity of parents in your parish – to each focus group meeting. Ask parents to reserve one hour for the meeting.
4. Develop teams of two people for each focus group. Assign one person to lead the questioning and one person to take notes on the responses to the questions. The note-taker can also ask questions as a follow-up to the lead question.

Note: If you organize more than one focus group for an age group have the same people lead all focus groups for that age group. This will make tabulating results easier.

5. Use the questions below to be used in all of the focus groups. It is essential that all focus groups ask the same questions so that common answers can be identified across all of the focus groups.
6. Conduct the focus groups. Here is a sample introduction that can be adapted for your focus groups:

Thank you for your positive response to our invitation to participate in this focus group discussion as part of our research for new faith formation initiatives with parents and families. This conversation is an important element in our parish's desire to better serve parents and families. We are (names). We are task force members. I have a few questions for us to discuss. During this discussion, we will be taking a few notes so that we can more accurately recall our conversation. While this information will inform our study, no names will be attached to any of this information.

7. During the focus group meeting invite each parent to share his or her responses. It is not a group discussion. The goal is to hear everyone and record their responses. Keep the group moving through the questions. Don't get "stuck" on any one question. The goal is to surface lots of information from group members, not to conduct a group discussion on any one question.
6. Have each focus group team compile the interview notes into a report. This report will form the basis of developing a profile of all the interview responses.

Interview Questions

Use the following questions so that every focus group asks the same questions. (If you have time, you can ask the additional questions.)

Core Questions

1. What's the best thing about being a parent today?
2. What's the hardest thing about being a parent today?
3. What are the most important values you want to instill in your child/teen? How do you do this?
4. What are some of the ways you try to transmit the Catholic/Christian faith to your children/teens?
5. What are some of the things you do as a family (practices) to live your faith in everyday life?
6. What is one way your church can support you as a parent?
7. What is one way your church can help your family practice the faith?

Additional Questions

8. What would you say is one of your strengths as a parent of children/teens?
9. How are you trying to live your Catholic/Christian faith as an adult?
10. What's hard about raising your child/teen as a Catholic today?

Compiling and Analyzing Results

Organize a meeting to combine the individual interview or focus group results into one report. Use the following process to find the key themes that have emerged from the listening sessions. (The goal is to “make as much sense as you can” out of what you have heard).

Materials Needed:

- Easel paper (sticky)
- 4x6 size post-it notes (or larger size) in four colors – one for each age group (parents of young children, grade school, middle school, and high school)

Process

1. Have the interviewer and/or focus group leaders bring their notes from their listening session to the meeting.
2. Prepare individual easel sheets with each interview/focus group question written at the top. Draw a horizontal and vertical line on the newsprint to create four quadrants – one for each age group.
3. Organize the people into four working groups – parents of young children, parents of grade school children, parents of middle school young people, and parents of high school young people.
4. Ask each people to review their notes for each question.
5. Compile the results for each question in the following manner:
 - Give each group the color post-it notes for their age group.
 - Have each person (or team) share their responses from the interview or focus group.
 - As a group identify the common themes/responses to each question and write each theme on a separate post-it note.
 - Move on to the next question and proceed in the same manner through each question.
6. Have each group attach their post-it notes to the easel paper for each question, in the appropriate quadrant for their age group.
7. Review the responses to each question by reading the post-it notes to the group or having the group read the easel sheets on their own.
8. Identify common themes for each question and write them on a separate sheet of easel paper. Also circle important themes that are particular to one age group.
9. Reflect on the final work:
 - What do the findings and themes tell us about the parents in our parish?
 - How are parents trying to transmit faith to their children/teens?
 - How are families trying to live their faith in everyday life?
 - How can the parish support parents?
 - How can the church help families practice their faith?

3. Parent Survey

Tell Us About Yourself

We would like to know about you and your spouse's partner's religion. Which of the following best describes this?

- We are both Catholic
- I am Catholic, my spouse/partner is not
- My spouse/partner is Catholic and I am not
- I am Catholic and raising my children on my own
- I am not Catholic and raising my children on my own
- Neither of us are Catholic

Type of Family Structure (Pew Research Categories)

- Two parents in first marriage
- Two parents in remarriage (children living with a stepparent, stepsibling or half-sibling)
- Cohabiting parents
- Separated or divorced single parent
- Single parent, never married
- A caregiver, not the parent (e.g. grandparent)

Size of Family: 1 child 2 children 3 children 4+ children

Age of Children: 0-5 6-10 11-13 14-18

Income

- Living comfortably
- Meeting basic expenses with a little left over for extras
- Just meeting basic expenses
- Not having enough to meet basic expenses
- Don't know

Ethnicity

- White/European
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African-American
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other:

Employment

- Father / male caregiver employed full time
- Father / male caregiver employed part time
- Father / male caregiver unemployed
- Father / male caregiver stay-at-home parent
- Mother / female caregiver employed full time
- Mother / female caregiver employed part time
- Mother / female caregiver unemployed
- Mother / female caregiver stay-at-home parent

Parenting

Overall, how would you rate the job you do as a parent

Excellent Very Good Good Only fair Poor

How important is being a parent to who you are as a person

The most important aspect

One of the most important

Important but not one of the most important aspects

Not too important an aspect

Not an important aspect at all

How often do you find being a being a parent to be enjoyable

All of the time Most of the time Some of the time Rarely Never

How often do you find being a being a parent to be rewarding

All of the time Most of the time Some of the time Rarely Never

How often do you find being a being a parent to be stressful

All of the time Most of the time Some of the time Rarely Never

How often do you find being a being a parent to be tiring

All of the time Most of the time Some of the time Rarely Never

Who do you turn to for advice about parenting (check all that apply)

Spouse / partner

Family member (not a spouse or partner)

Friends

Parenting websites, books, magazines

Online communities / social media

Other:

Which of the following describes your parenting style, even if neither is exactly right?

Are you a parent who tends to:

Hold your ground too much Give in too quickly Neither

Are you a parent who tends to:

Praise their children too much Criticize their children too much Neither

Are you a parent who tends to:

Be overprotective Give too much freedom Neither

Are you a parent who tends to:

Push their children too hard Not push their children enough Neither

Tell Us about Your Religious Life

How do you view yourself religiously? Select one that best describes you.

Active believer involved in a parish community

Believer, occasionally involved in a parish community

Inactive believer, not involved in a parish community

Inactive nonbeliever

How important is your Catholic faith in your daily life. Is it...

- Not important
- Not too important in your life
- Important, but so are many other areas of your life
- Among the most important parts of your life
- The most important part of your life

Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend Mass currently

- Rarely or never
- A few times a year
- Once or twice a month
- Almost every week
- Every week
- More than once a week
- Homebound, shut-in, unable to get out
- Currently watching Mass online or on television due to the COVID-19 pandemic

How often do your children, ages 18 or younger, attend Mass with you?

- Always Most of the time About half the time Sometimes Never

Besides attending Mass, how involved are you in in parish activities or ministries

- Very involved Somewhat involved Involved a little Not involved at all

How often do your children, ages 18 or younger, participate with you in parish activities or ministries besides attending Mass?

- Always Most of the time About half the time Sometimes Never

How important is/was it to have your children...

- Baptized
- Celebrate their First Communion
- Receive the Sacrament of Confirmation

Current participation

- Parish-based children's religious education program
- Parish based teen youth program
- Catholic elementary or middle school
- Catholic high school
- None of the above

Family Practices

Do you more often pray...

(Definitely not, Probably not, Might or might not, Probably yes, Definitely yes)

- Individually With family Both individually and with family about equally

How often are you likely to pray during these times.

(Never, not often, some of the time, most of the time, always)

- Before bed
- When I wake up
- Before meals

- On feast days important to me
- At family gatherings
- While traveling
- When feeling ill
- When I feel blessed
- During Advent
- During Lent
- When I feel anxious or depressed
- During times of crisis

How often do you pray the rosary?

Never Less than once a year A few times a year Once or twice a month
 Almost every week More than once a week Every day

Do you typically pray the rosary with family?

Yes No

Please select up to 10 practices from the list below that you consider the most important family practices for helping children and teens grow in faith. You can select less than 10 practices, but please don't select more than 10.

- Praying as a family (meal time, bedtime)
- Praying as a family during times of struggle or crisis
- Encouraging teens to pray alone or with peers
- Reading the Bible as a family
- Encouraging children/teens to read the Bible alone or with their peers
- Celebrating the church year seasons at church (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter)
- Serving people in need as a family
- Eating together as a family
- Having family conversations about faith
- Watching videos, movies, or TV shows with religious content or themes
- Encouraging children/teens to talk about their doubts and questions about faith
- Talking about your faith and your religious tradition with your children and teens
- Asking your child's/teen's perspectives on faith, religion, social issues, etc.
- Providing moral instruction
- Participating in Sunday Mass as a family
- Celebrating rituals and sacraments at church as a family
- Participating in parish activities and programs as a family
- Encouraging and supporting your child/teenager to participate in church activities with peers

Thinking about yourself as a parent of children or teenagers today please rate how often you engage in the following family practices...

[Never, Rarely (once a month), Occasionally (a few times a month), Frequently (1 or 2 times a week), Regularly (3 or more times a week)]

- Praying as a family (meal time, bedtime)
- Praying myself as an adult
- Praying as a family during times of struggle or crisis
- Encouraging teens to pray alone or with peers
- Reading the Bible as a family
- Reading the Bible as an adult

- Encouraging children/teens to read the Bible alone or with their peers
- Taking time to grow in my own faith as an adult
- Celebrating the church year seasons at church (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter)
- Serving people in need as a family
- Serving people in need as an adult
- Eating together as a family
- Having family conversations
- Talking about faith or spirituality as a family
- Watching videos, movies, or TV shows with religious content or themes
- Encouraging children/teens to talk about their doubts and questions about faith
- Talking about your faith and your religious tradition with your children and teens
- Asking your child's/teen's perspectives on faith, religion, social issues, etc.
- Providing moral instruction
- Participating in Sunday Mass as a family
- Celebrating rituals and sacraments at church as a family
- Participating in parish activities and programs as a family
- Encouraging and supporting your child/teenager to participate in parish activities

Parental Faith & Parenting

Faith of Parents: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements
(*strongly agree – strongly disagree*)

- God cares for me in a special way.
- My faith helps me know right from wrong.
- My faith shapes how I think and act.
- I have a sense of sharing in a great purpose.
- I am keenly aware of being in the presence of God in my life.
- I live my life and make more decisions guided by Christian moral values that tell me what is right or wrong.
- I have a real sense that God is guiding me.
- I know that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died on a cross and rose again.
- I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people.
- I am involved in actions to serve those in need, work for justice, and/or care for creation.
- I feel God's presence when I serve people in need, work for justice, and/or care for creation.
- I see evidence that God is active in the world.
- I feel God's presence when I worship at Mass.
- I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation.
- I have found a way of life that gives me direction.
- Religious faith is important in my life.
- My life is committed to Jesus Christ.
- My life is filled with meaning and purpose.
- I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.
- I try to apply my faith to social issues.
- I talk with other people about my faith.
- I give significant portions of time and money to help other people

Parenting Practices

To what extent do you as a parent practice the following...

(Very much, somewhat, a little, not at all)

- I demonstrate a warm and affirming parenting approach with my children/teens.
- I engage in positive communication with my children/teens.
- I encourage my children/teens to pursue their talents and interests.
- I spend one-on-one time with my children/teens./
- I cultivate a warm, compassionate, and loving relationship with my children/teens.
- I engage my children/teens in family conversations.
- I engage my children/teens in family conversations about faith and religious matters.
- I provide moral and values formation of my children teens.
- I talk about my own faith with my children/teens.
- I practice my faith and share it with my children/teens.
- I participate with my children/teens in activities, such as service projects and parish programs.
- I ask for forgiveness when I am wrong or mess up.
- I try to balance religious firmness (this is what we belief and how we live) with religious flexibility (not forcing faith, but inviting and exploring), and respecting my child's/teen's views.

Catholic Faith

How essential is each of these elements to your vision of what the Catholic faith is?

- Belief that God is present in the sacraments
- Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus
- Charitable efforts toward helping the poor
- Belief that Christ is really present in the Eucharist
- Devotion to Mary the Mother of God
- Belief that God is present in a special way in the poor
- Necessity of having a Pope
- Efforts toward eliminating social causes of poverty
- The teaching that Christ establish the authority of the bishops by choosing Peter
- Having a regular prayer life
- Devotion to saints
- Obligation to attend Mass once a week
- Teachings which oppose abortion
- Belief that priests must be celibate
- Belief that men can be priests
- Opposition to same sex marriage