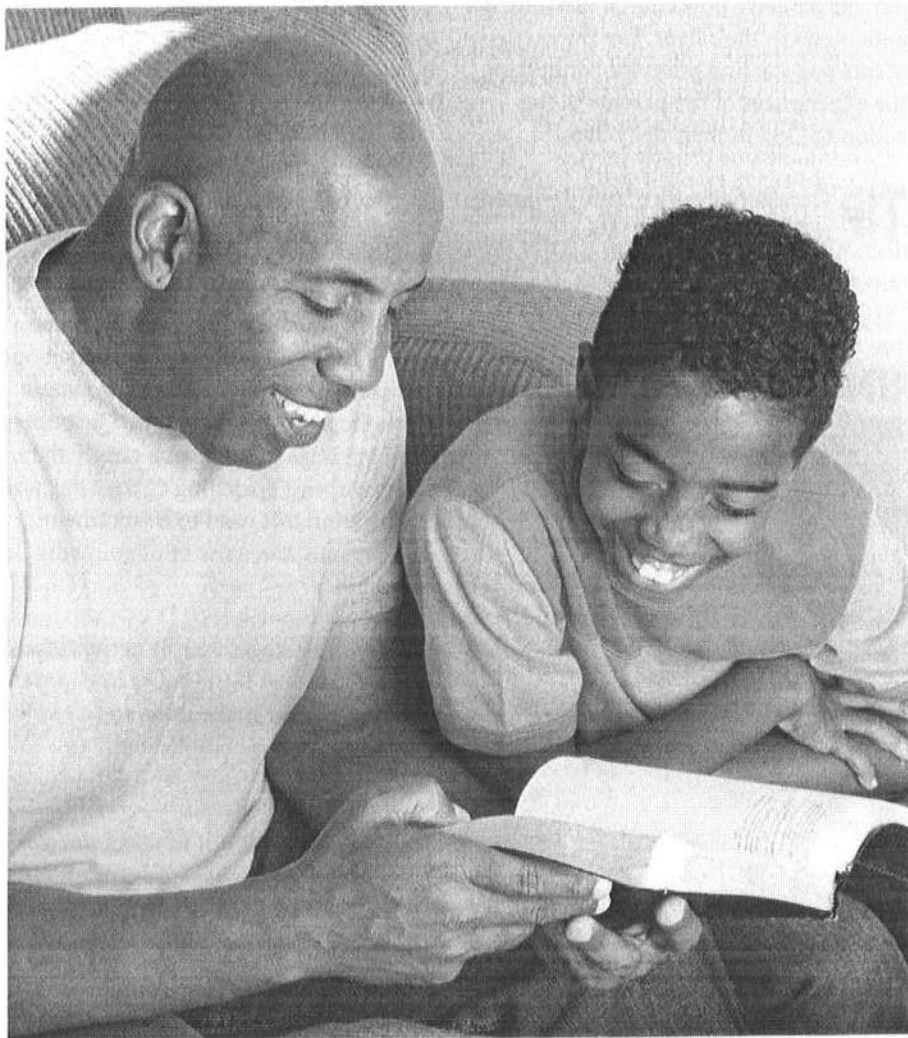


Four things to always do at parent sacramental meetings

BY TOM QUINLAN

Teach parents how to teach their children



As parish leaders know, the more we can meaningfully form parents in their own Catholic faith, the more our children's ministry can have a deep and lasting impact.

Preparation of the children to celebrate the initiation sacraments and reconciliation provides opportunities to focus on the faith formation of parents. Parishes have a profound responsibility to catechize and perhaps evangelize (or re-evangelize) the parents. There should never be a child celebrating a sacrament whose parents are not being formed through effective adult faith formation.

This article will focus on preparation for the sacrament of Eucharist. The principles can easily be applied to other sacraments as well.

Here are four elements of effective parent formation:

1 Require attendance

Some parishes shy away from "requiring" parents' attendance. However, you have a responsibility to make sure that parents are well-formed. Keep in mind, though, if you are going to require their presence at formation sessions, you also have a responsibility to make sure the sessions are high quality.

TIP What about parents who cannot attend for good reasons? Video the sessions, and schedule appointments for viewing the video with parents who were absent.

2 Provide a warm, hospitable experience

Don't underestimate the impact of environment. Choose a pleasant space for your gathering. Create a prayerful, inviting, and comfortable ambience. Work at "over-welcoming" everyone. First impressions set the tone. Treat parents as valued adult members of the parish community. Have refreshments attractively available.

TIP Start with an icebreaker that gets the parents talking among themselves to help create a sense of community.

3 Make connections between life and Catholic faith

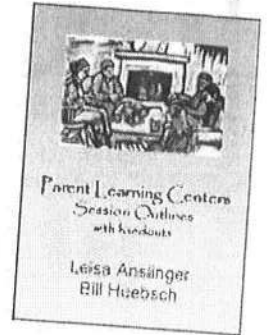
Explore the richness of Scripture and Catholic tradition, but make sure that

Parent learning centers

Twenty-Third Publications publishes a series of coaching sessions for parents. These outlines and worksheets are reproducible and ready to use. They come to you as Word files, allowing you to alter and adjust them to suit your local parish or school situation. All the handouts, prayers, and other elements you need are there, each in its own handy file.

Coaching parents takes place while their children are in class. Special attention is paid to non-Catholic parents, to families with children in more than one age group, and to households which are not regularly active in parish life.

There are 13 topics, including sacraments, Scripture, morality, and prayer. These outlines can be easily tailored to correspond to each of the major Catholic religion programs in use in the United States. For more information, go to tinyurl.com/coachparents.



parents perceive how church teaching is good news in their lives. Use the sacraments as a starting point for connecting the experiences of the parents to the action of God in their daily lives.

TIP Occasionally ask a well-designed reflection question. Such

questions should help parents see the availability of God's grace and relevancy of Catholic faith in their own lives.

4 Stress the importance of their bringing the faith home for their family

We must help parents integrate Catholic faith at home so they feel empowered to lead their children's faith development. At parent meetings, we must help them learn how to talk to their children about the sacraments, about Jesus, and about Catholic faith. We must try to help them imagine ways of living as a family that are joyful and enriching as they journey together on this road to a sacrament... and beyond it to a life of ongoing discipleship.

TIP Offer some specific activities and practices for families to choose from. But don't make them too "churchy" or too complicated.) □

IDEAS FOR FAITH SHARING



Provide parents a lectionary-based resource that offers reflections and sharing questions on the Sunday readings. *Exploring the Sunday Readings* from Twenty-Third Publications is one good example.

Give parents some pointers on how to lead faith-sharing and prayer with their children. Include ideas for creating a home prayer space. Suggest Sunday evenings as a preferred time for this weekly faith-sharing prayer. Regularly remind and encourage parents about this throughout the year, and request testimonials to share with parents and the entire parish.



Provide parents with a "car question" for each week. The idea here is to have families discuss a new weekly faith question while they are driving together.

Parishes can create their own questions (ask parents to help) or find published resources. For example, see the Twenty-Third Publications website, tinyurl.com/faithq.

todaysparish.com



Tom Quinlan is the director of the Religious Education Office for the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois.

Contact him at tquinlan@dioceseofjoliet.org.