

CATHOLIC
PARENT
KNOWHOW

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Mystagogia

YOUR QUESTIONS
ANSWERED

A Lifelong Relationship with Christ



Dear Parents,

“Become what you see, and receive what you are.” These words come from a sermon of St. Augustine, and they remind us that when we receive Jesus in the sacraments, we are *formed* as the Body of Christ. We become what we receive.

Your child has just completed his or her celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation. In Baptism, your child became a son or daughter of God and a member of the Church. In Confirmation, your child was sealed with the Holy Spirit and strengthened with the gifts of the Spirit. In the Eucharist, your child received (and continues to receive) Jesus himself — body, blood, soul, and divinity.

The Sacraments of Initiation are more than spiritual milestones. They are the beginning of a lifelong relationship with Christ and his Church. They are a call to continuing conversion — lifelong growth in our faith as we live as disciples of Jesus. In

fact, the word *mystagogia* (from the Greek for “contemplating the mysteries”) means a lifelong journey of growing closer to God. The sacraments give us the grace to live the new life to which we are called.

This booklet is about living the promise we celebrate in the Sacraments of Initiation. It is about diving ever deeper into the Mystery we proclaim: the Paschal Mystery of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. But is also our story, for we have been baptized in Christ, born into a new life, and we are destined to be with God in heaven.

The path of discipleship is not always an easy one. This shouldn’t surprise us. Jesus went to the cross, and following him we are called to take up crosses in our own lives. But God and his Church are here to help us every step of the way. Let us continue this wonderful journey!

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Helping Children Respond to the Gifts of the Spirit



At Confirmation, your child has been sealed and strengthened with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are exactly what we need to live life to its fullest.

➤ **Wisdom** helps you see yourself as God sees you and act as God wants you to act. Wisdom allows you to live in the image and likeness of God. One way we can grow in wisdom is to form ourselves with sacred Scripture. Prior to Mass each Sunday, look up the Lectionary readings. Talk about the readings as a family, asking how God might be speaking to us through these readings and why the Church chose these readings to be read together. What is the common theme?

➤ **Understanding** allows you to get to know God, yourself, and others better and to see how you sometimes make the wrong choices in life. With understanding comes help to make better choices and forgive more freely. One way to grow in understanding is to practice a daily examination of conscience. At bedtime, help your child review each day, asking, "How did I live as a child of God today? What can I do better tomorrow?" God will help us live as disciples if we ask him to.

➤ **Counsel (Right Judgment)** helps you give good advice to others and hear the Holy Spirit, who speaks to you through the good advice and good example of others. Encourage your children to look for ways they can be an example to others. If they have younger siblings, talk about practical ways they can model kindness, mercy, and other important qualities at home. Remind them that younger children look up to them, and this is both a gift and a responsibility.

➤ **Fortitude (Courage)** helps you stand up for what is right even when doing so is difficult, and allows you to face and overcome your fears, which can sometimes lead you to making the wrong choices or failing to love others. One of the most often repeated phrases in Scripture is "be not afraid." If your child is particularly fearful or nervous in a given situation, encourage your child to pay attention to what is happening in his or her body (e.g., elevated heart rate, tense muscles) and to counteract this fear response by taking slow, deep breaths and relaxing one group of muscles

at a time. If your child says something like, "I'll never get this right" or, "I can't do it," encourage him or her to come up with another way to think about it, an alternative thing to say.

➤ **Knowledge** allows you to be open to God's loving communication and know God in the way that you come to know someone you love and who loves you. God is always speaking to us — through his creation, through the events and opportunities of our lives, through the people we love, through the silence of prayer, and through sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition. Encourage your child to be open to God's voice. Periodically ask, "What do you think God might be trying to tell you right now?"

➤ **Piety (Reverence)** helps you to show faithful love and honor to God and allows you to recognize the importance of spending time talking and listening to God in prayer. Create a sacred space in your home, like a table or nook, on which you place a few sacred objects. Let this space be a reminder to stop and spend a moment with God each day. Before you leave home, gather for a moment in front of the sacred space and ask God to bless your day.

➤ **Fear of the Lord (Wonder and Awe)** allows you to know that God is greater than any created thing and reminds you to be open to his powerful goodness. Give your child opportunities to experience the wonder of God's creation. If you are near a national park or another natural wonder, make a visit and discuss the beauty of God's design. Be sure also to look for opportunities in daily life to discover beauty and wonder. These are reminders to us of how powerful and majestic our God is.



Growth in the Spirit

Fruits of God



Charity

Charity consists of loving God “above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for love of God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1844). Prompt your child to look for ways he or she can show God’s love to others, beginning in the home. For example, you could say: “Your mother had a long day today. What do you think you can do to help?” or, “Your brother is feeling really sad about losing his soccer game. How could you help cheer him up?”

Joy

In his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis states: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness” (1). Our ultimate joy comes from the freedom and hope of knowing Jesus Christ. We are called to live out this joy, remembering all that God has done for us. When you pray as a family before meals, periodically take turns naming something you are thankful to God for. As our gratitude increases, so does our joy.



Peace

When the Holy Spirit takes root in our lives, we experience the peace of God and share it with those we meet. Invite your child to consider how he or she can be a peacemaker at home with siblings and at school with friends. How can he or she respond to conflict with a gesture of mercy? You might wish to role-play some ways to resolve conflicts and be a peacemaker.

Patience

Patience is becoming rare in our fast-paced society of instant gratification. Help your child grow in patience by practicing waiting. Don’t always drop everything when your children request something. Let them know you heard their request, and ask them to wait until you are finished with what you are doing. Working over time toward a goal can also be a great way to practice patience. Is there something on your child’s wish list that he or she can patiently work to earn over time?

Faithfulness

As followers of Jesus, we honor our commitments to God and to others. Teach your son or daughter the importance of following up on volunteer and work commitments and being accountable to teams we are part of. Model faithfulness by keeping your promises to family members, and encourage your child to do the same.

Modesty

The *Catechism* states that “the forms taken by modesty vary from one culture to another,” but adds, “Teaching modesty to children and adolescents means awakening in them respect for the human person” (2524). Modesty, as a fruit of the Spirit, goes beyond the view of the body to respect for and protection of the dignity of others and “inspires a way of life which makes it possible to resist the allurements of fashion and the pressures of prevailing ideologies” (2523). Encourage your children to view themselves, and others, as sons and daughters of God and to dress and conduct themselves with the dignity that befits this call.

Kindness

Kindness can be the smallest loving gesture, however undeserved. In a world that can often be self-centered, kindness means taking other people into consideration. Invite your child to look for small ways to be kind to others. This was the essence of St. Thérèse



God's Gifts

of Lisieux's "Little Way" of holiness. She did even the smallest things as if she was doing them for Jesus himself.

Goodness

The Greek word used in Galatians 5:22 to describe this fruit of the Spirit is *agathosune*, meaning righteousness or uprightness specifically for the good of others (not simply for the sake of righteousness). It is a reminder that when we strive to be good as God is good, we should never think of ourselves as better than others, but rather look for ways to build others up

through virtue. Invite your child to consider ways in which he or she may model virtue and help others to grow in virtue as well.

Gentleness

Sometimes the secular world thinks of gentleness as weakness, but stop to consider the context in which we use this word. We speak of "gentle giants." We ask bigger, stronger kids to "be gentle" when patting a newborn baby. Gentleness is not the absence of strength, but the restraint, or channeling, of strength out of mercy toward the other. The best way to teach gentleness to children is to *be* gentle with them. Sometimes our children need mercy more than justice. Ask God to help you know when they need a gentle hand rather than a firm one.

Generosity

When we appreciate all that God has given, we naturally feel like sharing with others. Check into local ministries and charities where you and your child can share your time and talents together for the benefit of others.

Self-Control

The part of the brain responsible for impulse control is not fully developed until young adulthood. That said, children do have a

A healthy, growing tree bears fruit. As we allow the gifts of the Spirit to take root in our hearts, we will bear fruit as well — the fruits of the Holy Spirit (see CCC 1832, Galatians 5:22).



capacity for self-regulation, and the Holy Spirit invites us all to grow in self-control as we make use of the grace God

gives us. One way to help your son or daughter grow in self-control is to prompt your child for self-monitoring. If there are situations in which self-control is challenging for your child, let your child know, in advance, one or two behaviors you would like to see in that situation. Tell him or her that you will be watching to see how things go and will ask your child afterward how he or she did. Compare your observations with your child's, and offer praise for accurate self-monitoring.

Chastity

The *Catechism* defines chastity as: "The successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being" (2337). Chastity is about appropriately integrating our mind, body, and spirit so we can be all that God created us to be. Raise your child to appreciate his or her body as a creation of God and worthy of dignity. Nurture the virtues as the foundation for integration of sexuality. Watch for some of the threats to chastity that are sometimes presenting themselves earlier in childhood (e.g., exposure to inappropriate imagery online), but most of all, help your child appreciate the *goodness* and *beauty* of God's plan for the body.



Continuing the Journey

Six Discipleship Habits for Families

When we are fully initiated into the Church, we are still at the beginning of the path. Now comes *living* the Faith in everyday life as disciples of Jesus. In our Catholic faith, the family is called the *domestic church*; it is the church of the home — the first place the Christian community is formed and expressed. It is our responsibility as family to help and encourage one another on the path to heaven. Here are six ways we can live as disciples in our families:

1

Imitate Jesus, even in the smallest of actions. The phrase “what would Jesus do?” (WWJD) became a fad years ago and then was thought of by some as a cliché. But discipleship really is all about asking ourselves, as we make decisions small and large throughout the day, how to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. He is our pattern. He shows us what it means to be truly human. When your child is making a decision, or if he or she is having trouble with a friend or sibling, coach him or her to stop and imagine what Jesus might do and then do likewise.

2

Pray together. Pope Saint John Paul II, in his *Letter to Families*, wrote, “Prayer increases the strength and spiritual unity of the family, helping the family to partake

of God’s own ‘strength’” (4). Chances are, you won’t “find time” to pray together; you will have to *make* time. Begin with some of the times you are already together — perhaps in the car on the way to school or activities, at the dinner table, before or after homework time. If you are not already in a habit of family prayer, it’s okay to start simple — perhaps with an Our Father followed by each family member telling God “thank you” for one blessing.

3

Attend Sunday Mass. Scripture tells us, “We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:25). To faithfully live a Christian life, we need one another, and we need the grace of the Eucharist. Make Sunday Mass a priority. This can set the tone for your week, will help keep you connected with Jesus and with families that share your values, and will support a healthy family life.

4

Discover and use your gifts. God has given each person unique talents to share in his or her work in the world. Nurture your child’s talents by naming them and providing opportunities to develop them. Brainstorm with your child ways that he or she might use these talents for good in the family, parish, school,

or community. Some families enjoy serving together in their parishes and communities. This can be a valuable bonding experience as well as a way to live our faith.

5

Adopt some “family saints.”

Help your child learn about the saints, who are our ultimate role models as disciples. Do some research on young saints, such as St. Dominic Savio, St. Maria Goretti, and Blessed José Sanchez del Rio. Saints that were closer to your child in age can be especially powerful examples. If possible, find books or videos about the saint your child is named for, or the saint whose name he or she took at confirmation. Place an icon or statue of the saint on your home altar or in your child’s room. Pray to your family saints often, asking for their intercession in the events of your daily lives.

6

Continue to learn about the Faith.

We can always learn more about Christ and his Church. A living faith is a growing faith. Make sure your child is involved in parish or school faith formation, and look for adult faith formation opportunities in your parish as well. You are your child’s first and most important teacher, and you will naturally form your children as you continue to learn.

INSPIRING CHILDREN TO Live and Share the Faith

Disciples live and share their faith. Here are four ways parents can inspire their children to live out what they have celebrated in the sacraments and share their faith with others:

Nurture their natural

joy. Get to know what excites your children, and be excited with them. Children are naturally curious and excited about learning new things. When talking with your children about their faith, ask them what questions they have. For example, you might ask, “What are some things you wonder about?”

Another aspect of nurturing the natural joy of children is guiding them away from negative thinking habits. In general, children tend to be more positive than adults. Scientists have shown that children smile and laugh more often than grown-ups, but sometimes we inadvertently set the wrong example through cynical or negative statements. Children pick up on these statements and imitate them, and over time this changes the quality of their thinking. Some examples are predicting a negative outcome (“This probably won’t work out”) or extreme statements (“This always happens to me”). We should work hard to catch ourselves when we are thinking negatively and consider other more positive points of view. We can help children do this as well, by asking, “What’s a more positive way to think about that?”

Help them dream. Adults often ask kids what they want to be or do when they grow up. Children are rarely asked who *God* is calling them to be. Encourage them to think about God’s plan for their lives. Developmental psychology helps us to understand that there are two ages when kids are thinking hard about what kind of adults they will be. One time this happens is at age seventeen. That’s no surprise, since in our culture they are only one year away from being considered adults. But another time that kids think about their future selves is at age eleven. This is because the physical growth that occurs at this age is a significant reminder to them that they will not be children forever. As they face the fact that they will someday be men or women, they begin to ask themselves what kind of man or woman they will be. This is a great time to talk with your children about vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and marriage, as well as discuss various ways to serve God in everyday occupations.

Help them articulate their faith. Each week in parish or school religion class, your child learns an important aspect of the Faith. Be sure to ask them, “What did you learn today?” Stay in touch with your child’s catechist or religion teacher so you know what your child is learning and can support his or her continued learning. This communication sometimes comes home in the form of parent or family pages from your child’s religion book. Here, you will often find the main points your child has learned in class as well as where you can find out more in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and sacred Scripture. Engage your child in conversation about these main points and practice with them how they might respond to a person who asks about their Catholic beliefs.

Help them apply what they have learned. In *Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis states: “Realities are greater than ideas. ... This principle impels us to put the word into practice, to perform works of justice and charity which make that word fruitful” (233). Children are concrete thinkers, and they need guidance from adults to find ways that the lessons they learn connect with their lives. Give them examples of ways they can live what they have learned — in the family, in their schools, at the parish, and in their communities.

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PRAYER FOR PARENTS

Father, lead me as I continue to guide my child on the path of discipleship. Help our family to grow in love for you and for one another. Jesus, help us to immerse ourselves in your Paschal Mystery, drawing closer to you and becoming more like you. Holy Spirit, fill us with your love, and help us to continue to be open to your gifts so we can live fruitful lives as followers of Jesus. Amen.



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