



Four Keys to Nurturing Faith *in Families*

Reflection

In Part One of this series we were made aware that developing children's faith is very much a part of the ordinary everyday life of families.

The ways in which families relate to and care for each other reflects the love and compassion of Christ and are essential to meaningful spiritual formation. Christian parents aid this formation by being intentional and weaving 'God moments' into daily family life.

In Part One we considered 'Caring Conversation' and 'Devotional Practices' and how these were keys to nurturing faith in family, in this part we look at 'Family Service' and 'Rituals and Traditions' as further keys.

3

Family Service

(This Part describes Keys Three and Four.)

Service (giving time, resources and energy to help others) is an extremely powerful way of sharing our faith and values with those around us: it shows how faith makes a difference in our lives. While children and young people can participate in and experience service in a whole range of contexts - e.g. as individuals, at school, at youth group and in the parish - family service has particular power and significance.

Parents who model helping behaviours and guide their children to help others in Christ's name preach a powerful 'living sermon'. By serving with parents and those of other generations, children and youth learn service as a lifelong virtue and discipline. Working together toward a common goal is a powerful bonding tool for many families.

The opportunities for family service are endless. A family could:

- Make a food, clothing, or toy hamper for a family in need;
- Contribute prepared meals to a food bank;
- Help an elderly person, perhaps a neighbour, with their garden or household tasks on a regular basis;
- Visit family, friends and parishioners who are unwell or in a nursing home;
- 'Adopt' an elderly member of the parish to visit and to have to your home;
- Together as family, buy groceries for a food pantry supporting the needy;
- Participate in community bush regeneration or rubbish clearing;
- Sponsor a child through World Vision or similar organization;
- Make get-well cards to send to sick people in the parish community;
- Contribute as a family to Project Compassion;



- Attend and support St Vincent de Paul and other community service and fund raising events;
- Participate in parish ministries as a family group.

4 Rituals and Traditions

Rituals are behaviours or actions that are repeated again and again and traditions are customs that we adopt to give our lives meaning and purpose. Within the Christian home, rituals and traditions play a vital role in the practice and sharing of faith with one another. They are a means of weaving faith into our everyday interactions with one another, and giving focus to Christ in the chaos and frantic busyness that characterizes much of family life today.

Family mealtimes, holiday get-togethers and nightly bedtime routine are examples of rituals and traditions that make deep and lasting impressions on children.

The power of faith rituals and traditions is that they give rhythm, shape and order to our lives; provide consistency and predictability, connect us with others, giving us a sense of who we are and where we belong; and they reflect and enact values, reminding us of what is important.

Most families will already have some rituals and traditions in place and it is never too late to start new ones or reinvent old ones! The challenge is to find ways to 'tweak' our family rituals and traditions by adding a faith component at every opportunity.

Examples of family Faith Rituals and Traditions include the following:

- Saying Grace together before meals; giving blessings; saying bedtime prayers;
- Celebrating baptism anniversaries; birthdays; wedding anniversaries; annual holidays, anniversaries of a death;
- Connecting faith practices with the irregular events that arise in family life such as, graduations from school/university, gaining a driver's licence, weddings, house moving, celebrating significant birthdays e.g. 18, 21, 60 etc.
- Bringing into the home the meaning, practice and symbolism of the various church seasons - Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. As families, walk through the church season at home by means of ritual and tradition so that the Christ story can be deeply interwoven with the family's own emerging stories of life together;
- Imbuing secular commemorations with Christian meaning and significance such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Australia Day, Anzac Day and New Year's Eve, each provide an opportunity for families to gather for related prayer and thanksgiving.