

RAISING CHILDREN OF FAITH

Good parenting involves vigilance, not obsession says Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of Love*. Highlighting the role that parents play in the moral development of their children, he states that parents “should take up this essential role and carry it out consciously, enthusiastically, reasonably and appropriately” (AL, 259).

Parents need to be concerned with those influences to which their children are exposed. Moral education can lead children to grow in maturity and discipline so they are able to “act intelligently and prudently whenever they meet difficulties” (AL, 261). Vigilance always seeks to develop processes that strengthen and prepare children for challenges when they are apart from parents.

Vigilant parents are concerned not only with the physical spaces their children inhabit, and media influence, but are also concerned with “existential spaces” and seeks therefore to understand the convictions, goals, desires and dreams of their children.

Pope Francis offers three questions for parents to consider:

- Do we seek to understand “where” our children really are in their journey?
- Where is their soul, do we really know?
- And above all, do we want to know?

To answer these questions, parents must find opportunities to speak of important things as husband and wife, as well as with their children. Families should cultivate a multitude of healthy ways to spend time, and encourage in critical thinking regarding media.

KEY ELEMENTS OF ETHICAL FORMATION:

While parents are free to choose Catholic Schools or parish religious education programs to support them in the moral development of their children, “a person’s affective and ethical development is ultimately grounded in a particular experience, namely, that his or her parents can be trusted” (AL, 263) as such, real moral formation takes place in the family setting.

Pope Francis highlights the following 6 considerations for educating children.

1. HELP CHILDREN LEARN TO DEVELOP GOOD HABITS

In the family, children should be encouraged to practice good habits. Habits become interiorized into values which then motivate consistent ways of acting. Thus good habits become virtue, “a conviction that has become a steadfast inner principle of operation” (AL, 267). Likewise, bad habits lead to vice.

2. TEACH CHILDREN TO UNDERSTAND THAT ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Children need both praise and correction. Even the youngest children can be trained to ask for forgiveness and repair harm they have caused others. Parents should encourage children to consider the consequences of their words and actions and when a child does something wrong, the behavior should be corrected. Correction is an “incentive whenever children’s efforts are appreciated and acknowledged, and they sense their parents’ constant, patient trust” (AL, 269). Discipline should be used as a stimulus to further progress not to discourage children.

“The family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom...It is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen to share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one” (AL, 274, 276).



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3. PROPOSE VALUES WITH PATIENT REALISM

Moral education should be presented in a manner appropriate to the age of the young person. Here, Pope Francis remarks, “Ordinarily this is done by proposing small steps that can be understood, accepted and appreciated, while including a proportionate sacrifice” (AL, 271). Parents should instill in their children a moral conscience that reflects God’s law as found in Scripture and teachings of the Church.

4. USE DAILY FAMILY LIFE TO MODEL AND PRACTICE SELF-MASTERY

Family is the first experience of society that children encounter. It is here that “we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one” (AL, 275). Everyday the family has opportunities to practice care for others, rethink our habits of consumption and care for the environment as our home.

5. DO NOT TRIVIALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF SEX EDUCATION

In a culture that trivializes sexuality, parents need to provide “positive and prudent” sex education to their children that is understood in the “broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving” (AL, 280). Modesty has immense value in helping children to avoid reducing affection and sexuality “to an obsession with genitality and unhealthy behaviors that distort our capacity for love” (AL, 212).

Children should learn appreciation for the way their body is created and respect the complementary design of being created male and female, “for thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation” (AL, 285).

6. MAKE PASSING ON THE FAITH A PRIORITY

In baptism the gift of faith is received, parents are to help that gift of faith grow, “In all families, the Good News needs to resound, in good times and in bad, as a source of light along the way” (AL, 290). Prayer is a lived expression of faith and nurtures our relationship with God; therefore, “it is essential that children actually see that, for their parents, prayer is something truly important” (AL, 288). Parents teach children the importance of their faith through witness of service to the poor and marginalized, protection of creation and promoting common good through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

“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’” (AL, 290).



THIS WEEK: Introduce prayer into your child’s life by asking them to name their blessings before bedtime and thank God together for the joys in their life.

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THIS SEVEN-PART SERIES OF BULLETIN INSERTS IS AIMED AT HELPING INDIVIDUALS REFLECT UPON POPE FRANCIS’ APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, *AMORIS LAETITIA (ON LOVE IN THE FAMILY)*.