

Exploring Soulful Parenting

Create Spiritual Heritage

- If your child used a scale of one to ten to rate how God-centered your family life is, what would be the rating?
- If your child were then asked to list evidence to support the rating, what examples would be cited?
- If a stranger were to spend one week with your family, how would the stranger rate the spiritual climate of your home?

Creating spiritual heritage within the family is essential to the role of Christian parent. By word, example, and family environment, you initiate your children into the ways of maturity, salvation, holiness, social contribution, and social justice.

You are the primary evangelizer of your children, responsible for introducing them to Jesus and teaching them how to imitate him. Each effort in soulful formation is part of the spiritual inheritance that you are creating for your family.

The main challenge in transmitting heritage is naming your identity, roots, values and principles, and the pattern of God's revelation and response to you throughout your history. That takes prayer, reflection, and growth in self-knowledge. When you can name the *whats* of your spiritual heritage, you will find your own *ways* and *hows* to communicate them to your children. Therefore, what follows is merely a framework for conversation, not a required blueprint.

Environment—*Are there physical reminders of the sacred in your home—crucifixes, statues, plaques, slogans?*

Create a sacred space in your home, such as a centerpiece on the meal table, an end table, or on top the television. Place a symbol of the liturgical season on a placemat or napkin of the liturgical color. For example, display an empty crib during Advent, nails and crown of thorns during Lent, or an arrangement of cards with the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost.

Include a "prayer dish," a place to hold intentions and the names of people or problems known to family members. If the meal table serves this purpose, light a candle before praying grace and pause to reflect on your centerpiece.

Customs—*Do you create customs to sprinkle family time with the sacred?*

These might include placing the Christ Child in the crib as the first activity of Christmas morning or after attending the Vigil Mass, re-consecrating crucifixes in the house on the feast of the Holy

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Cross, establishing a family custom for prayer before and after a meal, or using conversation-starter sticks at the beginning of a meal. (Write questions or topics on tongue-depressors or Popsicle sticks to make conversation-starter sticks.)

Rituals—*Do you have routines that include God in the daily events of family life?*

Rituals such as a morning greeting, a bedtime blessing, or a New Year blessing of the home make lasting impressions on your children. Making the sign of the cross on the forehead of children when they leave the house is a powerful reminder to children that God is always with them. Rituals such as these and others become part of the rich spiritual heritage you pass on to your children.

Family Eucharist and sacraments—*Beyond the Sunday liturgy, do you have family occasions for celebrating the Mass and other sacraments?*

Children learn from parents the importance of the sacraments by the frequency they are celebrated and the emphasis put on them. Frequent reception of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation is especially significant when they are “the celebrations of choice” on non-obligatory occasions. The importance put on special family days, such as baptisms, weddings, or funerals emphasizes further how God lives in your family and celebrates in special ways with you.

Personal example—*Do you speak of your relationship with God?*

Do you frequently say things like, “I need to pray about that before I can give you an answer” or “When I was praying last week I talked with God about your friend Sammy”?

God will guide you

Charged with the evangelization of their families, parents are prophets who reveal the face of God; priests who dialogue daily with God; and servant-kings who practice the compassion and mercy of God. Imitation of Christ is the means of evangelization, and the home is the first school of holiness. The vocation of Christian parenting is quite a responsibility!

Be assured that God's love does not call where God's grace cannot keep! You have been called. You have been given a divine mission. You may feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of your call. Some days you may feel inadequate to meet the challenges.

When you feel you have failed at being the best parent possible, let the advice of Mother Teresa encourage you, “You are not called to be successful; you are called to be faithful.”

Check It Out

- ✓ Are there reminders of the sacred in your home—crucifixes, statues, plaques?
- ✓ Do you create customs to sprinkle family time with the sacred?
- ✓ Do you have routines that include God in the daily events of family life?
- ✓ Beyond Sunday Mass, do you have family celebrations that include Mass?
- ✓ Do you speak of your relationship with God?