

FAMILY INTERVIEW AND INVENTORY

Leader Guide



Faith and Family Life
Catholic Ministries

AN INVITATION

You have been invited to lead and accompany a family in their faith formation journey. Begin the journey by sitting down with each of your ministry's families either in-person or via Zoom for a 20-30 minute interview to check-in and assess where they are along their path. This is meant to be genuine dialogue and not an inquisition. Meeting a family where they are and establishing a relationship of trust will be decisive in their willingness to follow where you lead them.

These meetings can be transformational for your ministry. Inviting your families into your office, providing them with hospitality, good conversation, and meeting them where they are at can make all the difference. These interviews provide the perfect start to a family's faith formation experience!

Then, invite parents to experience a self-led inventory designed to facilitate a reflection on their experience of faith and what they desire moving forward.

Dialogue is a free and gratuitous initiative, takes its cues from love, is not commensurate with the merits of its participants, is not binding, is for all without distinctions and grows in a gradual way. (DC 53)

In the time of the new evangelization, the Church desires that catechesis as well should accentuate this dialogical style, to make more easily visible the face of the Son who, as with the Samaritan woman at the well, stops to begin a dialogue with every human being in order to lead him or her with gentleness to the discovery of the living water (cf. Jn 4: 5-42). (DC 54)

For catechesis as well, "it means developing a pastoral dialogue without relativism, which does not negotiate one's Christian identity, but which seeks to reach the heart of the other, of others different from us, and there to sow the Gospel." (DC 54)

REFLECTION

We would like to begin by inviting you to pray over a familiar passage from the Gospel of Luke and to reflect on how it can cast a vision for us in our ministry of accompaniment.

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you

discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?” And he replied to them, “What sort of things?” (Luke 24:13-19)

We are all on a journey of faith with the vast majority of what we experience never known by another person. We all carry and wrestle with so much. The families we serve are the same. In a world that values productivity over meaning, it is no wonder we can get caught up in the rat race of life. Our faith is essential, yet it may not feel as pressing as the other daily tasks that can engulf a family. An interview is an opportunity to meet your families along the road as Jesus met the disciples. The disciples were walking away from Jerusalem feeling let down and disappointed by what they thought was going to happen with the Messiah. Many families we meet are too in the process of walking away from the Church, feeling disappointed and let down. Jesus does not let his disciples just walk away, he meets them along the road and shares in their concerns; he accompanies them.

Jesus knew exactly what was in their hearts, yet humbly asked them the simple question: What sort of things? We can hear him saying to us in our own wrestling, tell me about that. God cares about what we care about, he is not blind to our needs, nor dismissive of our struggles. We have a God that draws close to us and walks with us, prioritizing relationships above all things. We too have the opportunity to be the presence of God for the families we have been given the grace to accompany through a process of formation. We know how the story ends. Jesus first listened to them, which opened their hearts to listen to him. They invited him into their home, were transformed by the breaking of the bread, and were impelled to return to Jerusalem. This is the process of formation we are inviting families to enter. We meet them along the road, wherever they are on it and whatever direction they are walking, we listen, and we share. Then God willing, they will invite Christ to stay with them in their home, have their eyes opened by the breaking of the bread - the Mass, and have their lives turned back on the journey to the eternal Jerusalem - heaven.

PURPOSE

It is our hope that the purpose of these interviews remains to establish a relationship of trust and care for the families we have the privilege of serving. This is the work of pre-evangelization. We like to say these are interviews and not inquisitions, focusing on an encounter that is conversational, not confrontational. With limited time and

a task of evaluating engagement, there can be a temptation to jump to questions of frequency of religious practice or to make the interview about program specifics. Resist these temptations. From recent statistics we can assume the vast majority of families we are interviewing have little to no regular practice of faith at-home or at-church and may just be looking to do the minimum to check the box. This is an opportunity for so much more. We are meeting them along the road like Jesus. The important part is that they are there and desiring in some part a life of faith. Let us not break a bruised reed (Matthew 12:20), but rather create an experience they don't expect; one of hospitality and encouragement. Through the interview, you should be able to ascertain their current religious practice status implicitly, rather than explicitly. It is highly likely that you will know before the interview starts the families that are engaged in the life of the parish. We encourage you to invite these families into a roll of accompaniment, asking them to take on the role of a coach, to model and make disciples of the other families.

PLANNING

- Decide if you will be interviewing the parent/parents or including the entire family. If children are present make sure to not ask parents questions that would paint them in a negative light.
- Decide if you will meet in person or over a video conferencing platform.
- You should schedule 30 minutes per family, knowing that it may go a little longer or shorter depending on how much they share. Be good stewards of their time in order to respect any other commitments they may have.
- Think about what Jesus would say if he was there. Allow that to guide your responses. This needs to be a positive experience!
- Send an email ahead of time to the families outlining your plans for the year and what you hope to accomplish through these interviews.

GENERAL TIPS

Before they arrive, either in person or over a video conferencing platform, we invite you to say a little prayer for them and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time together. If in person and in certain senses online, the space you are in can contribute greatly to their experience. Space can allow people to open up or clamp down depending on how comfortable they feel. If you can invite them to sit in a comfortable place, like on a couch or chairs not separated by a desk, it will help to break down the formal feeling of distance between you and them. Privacy is key to honesty and the space you choose reflects the level of privacy that is afforded them. Especially online it is important that

others are not walking by in the background or that you are not in a public place for others to open up and answer honestly. If you are in person we encourage you to offer some sort of hospitality if you are able, like some water, tea, or coffee. Hospitality opens hearts and tells people you care about them for who they are before anything else happens.

Begin by welcoming the family. Introduce yourself and express your gratitude for the opportunity to get to know them better. Recognize that parents may feel a little nervous or apprehensive about being “interviewed.” Immediately let them know this is merely a chance to welcome them into this process and to get to know them and their family. This will help them be more at ease during your meeting. Begin with a prayer. You can use the one provided on the Interview Guide, or one of your choosing. The Interview Guide can be printed out for your convenience. Next, invite them to introduce themselves and each share one thing they love to do together as a family. A great way to grow in relationship is to show interest in what they are interested in, then they in turn will be interested in who you are interested in - Jesus. We can show our interest by how we listen and respond.

Active listening is a great way to show people we care about what they are sharing. Active listening involves watching for non-verbal cues to understand the meaning of what is being said, showing understanding through non-verbal cues like nodding and eye contact, paraphrasing back what the person shared in your own words according to your interpretation, and asking for clarification or adding comments where needed. Our language is also very important, both in what we say and how we hold ourselves. Above all we need to be kind in our speech. It is important to remember that something can be true, but not helpful in certain circumstances. It is said, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Our body language often communicates far more than our words as a response to what someone says. People need to be received in their communication to grow in trust. St. Francis so aptly teaches us to “seek to understand, before seeking to be understood.” We need to listen to understand and not only respond. Even if someone says something we don't agree with, we should trust the process of formation and stay in a position of curiosity, remember “tell me about that”. Also, don't be afraid to appropriately share about yourself as well, while keeping the focus on the family. Vulnerability gives others permission to share honestly.

The rest of the interview will be guided by intentionally designed questions that can be found on the Interview Guide. These are a guide and can be adapted to your people. Keeping in mind that the interview should be between 20-30 minutes asks as many questions as comfortably fit in the time. It may be helpful for you to answer

the question first as this will help give them a direction and time to think of their own response. Silence is also ok. To wrap up your time together thank them for their time and the opportunity to get to know them better. Ask if they have any questions for you. Conclude by expressing the Church's desire to support their family in this time of formation and beyond, then conclude with the prayer that is provided in the Interview Guide or one of your choosing. You can send the parents home with the Parent Inventory to begin the process of bridging the at-church and at-home realities.

You can have them printed out and ready for them to take home.

Take some time after the interview to write some notes about the family that might be important as you minister to them this year in your database. If you feel like going above and beyond, you can send them home with something tangible like a candle or a prayer card. Any handwritten cards you can send throughout the year on an anniversary or birthday are always a blessing and make a difference. We have also included a blank Pathways road map below that you can use to outline the path ahead for a specific family.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for this opportunity to gather in your name and learn more about one another. We ask you to send the Holy Spirit upon us to guide our time together and give us the assurance that you are with us always. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

QUESTIONS:

How has your family been doing?
What's been going well? What's been challenging?
What are you looking forward to this year?
Who has been an example of faith for you?
How has your personal experience of faith been so far?
Have you been able to have faith conversations at home? (This is the perfect time to tell them how you can help them with that with this process!)
What are some of the things you worry about as parents?
How can the Church better support you?
Is there anything else you feel could be helpful to note?
How can I pray for you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, thank you for the gift of the _____ family to our faith community. May they always be filled with your blessing and know that they belong to you. Give them strength and discernment as they journey through life together. Keep them safe from all harm and lead them forward in the hope of heaven. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PARENT INVENTORY

WELCOME

Welcome to family faith formation! This is a process that puts you at the center of sharing faith with your children. Faith is not as much taught, as it is caught. For this to happen it must be passed on and shared by the people children love, respect, and trust the most - their parents. Hearing this is not meant to be overwhelming or intimidating. God has blessed you with everything you need to lead your family to him. You are your children's first experience of God. If the best definition of God is that he is love, you are his hands and feet as you love and take care of his children. Grab a piece of paper and a pen before you begin.

AN INVITATION

Think back to those first moments when you held each of your children. There is nothing quite like the overwhelming sense of love you instantly have for this new little human. Nothing can truly prepare you for the joy of being part of God's plan for continuing life. You are a part of his creating. Reflect or journal for a few moments on what it feels like to know you are a co-creator with God. He continues to create through you! What were those first moments like when you ushered in new life?

Those first few years of raising a child can feel like such a blur, but somehow we as parents start to figure it out. The schedule of feeding, changing, and sleeping, and repeat! Our children literally depend on us. Before we know it, we move from helping a child survive, to raising a human being. Our children begin to repeat the things we say and follow our every move. It is about this time we start to realize that we are forming another person. We are forming their conscience, decision making skills, and their views of themselves and others. We are also teaching them how to possibly lead a family one day. It can be a little overwhelming! Take a moment and reflect on what it feels like to be responsible for forming another person.

We usually end up choosing to lead similar to the way our parents led us. Sometimes that seems like a good thing, and other times we have to try our best not to repeat what we now view as their mistakes. Thinking back on your childhood, what are a few positive experiences you would like to bring to your own parenting?

Faith is a gift that is passed on through families. Many times our image of God comes from our early experiences. God can be seen as a loving Father, a judge, a friend, a ruler, or he can feel absent. Take a moment and divide a piece of paper into four sections. In section one, reflect on your image of God when you were a child. In section two, reflect on your image of God as a teenager. In section three, reflect on your image of God as a young adult. In section four, reflect on your image of God as a parent.

What has your relationship with God been like throughout the years?
What is the image of God you would like to instill in your children?
Do you feel that you and your children need God in your lives? Why or why not?

Many of the big questions in life come from our understanding and belief in God. Our faith also tends to steer our values, thoughts, and the purpose of our life. This is why it is important as parents to reflect and wrestle with these bigger faith questions. We will be inviting our children into our own understanding.

When you were growing up, the family was more central to daily life, and television shows, music, and pop-culture were much more aligned with family values. With the beginning of the Internet and social media, today's children are bombarded with many different voices and images that are not necessarily delivered through parents who have a child's best interest in mind. This makes today's parents' role so exceptionally important. A parent must speak intentionally into the life of their child to set the values and beliefs they feel are important as the influences of the world will not prioritize this. As parents, we have the first responsibility for the education of our children. Our homes are the place where this teaching and learning happens. We have the opportunity to teach compassion, forgiveness, respect, humility, justice, integrity, and more. Children learn more from our daily examples than from any lecture we could ever give. Take a moment and look at the values and virtues below:

Acceptance, Authenticity, Boldness, Character, Commitment, Compassion, Cooperation, Courage, Creativity, Dependability, Faith, Flexibility, Forgiveness, Friendship, Generosity, Gratefulness, Hard Work, Helpfulness, Honesty, Hope, Humility, Humor, Independence, Initiative, Integrity, Joy, Justice, Kindness, Learning, Love, Optimism, Order, Patience, Peace, Perseverance, Prayer, Relationships, Respect, Self-Control, Service, Simplicity, Teamwork, Unity, Worship.

Which of these do you hope to develop and instill in your children?

If we want faith developed in our children, we need to be mindful of how we present it. If we make it feel like we "have to go to religion class" or "have to go to Mass" our children will see faith as an obligation. Faith is meant to be interwoven into the fabric of our life.

This makes it critical for us as parents to continue to form ourselves as we examine our own beliefs, grow in faith, and raise our children. This process is meant to be part of helping you go deeper in your own thoughts and feelings about faith and to help you be even more valuable in your role as a parent. Never forget, that you are not alone. God is with you, always trying to draw you close to him.

In closing, we want to remind you that you are a big deal - a really big deal. God thinks so too. He placed you at the head of a family. God does not only call the equipped, he equips the called. Your voice will always remain the strongest in the lives of your children. As you share faith in your home, you may get frustrated and overwhelmed, but remember faith is the greatest gift you can give your children. It is the one that remains with them forever.

PRAYER

God, please help me to be open to this new experience of sharing faith in my home. May I come to see this as an investment into leading my family. Allow me to start with myself, trusting that you meet me exactly where I am. Your love and grace are all I need. Amen.



PATHWAYS

