



# VISIT

## *LEADER GUIDE*



Faith and Family Life  
Catholic Ministries

# AN INVITATION

You have been invited to lead and accompany a family on their faith formation journey. A great way to begin and continue the journey is by sitting down with each of your families for a 20-30 minute visit to check-in and assess where they are along their path. This is meant to be genuine dialogue that facilitates an experience of feeling known and loved. 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 visits can be transformational for your ministry. Inviting your families into your office, providing them with hospitality, good conversation, listening from a place of love, and meeting them where they are can make all the difference. These visits provide the perfect start and continued connection point to a family's faith formation experience!

*In this renewed awareness of her vocation, the Church is also re-envisioning catechesis as one of her works in a missionary going forth. This means being willing to seek out the glimmers of truth that are already present in various human activities, trusting that God is mysteriously active in the heart of the human being before this has been explicitly reached by the Gospel. In this sense, she will find ways to draw near to the people of our time, walking alongside them wherever they happen to be. Catechesis, moreover, forms believers for mission, accompanying them in the maturation of attitudes of faith and making them aware that they are missionary disciples, called to participate actively in the proclamation of the Gospel and to make the Kingdom of God present in the world: "The Church's closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; 'communion and mission are profoundly interconnected.'" (DC 50)*

*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

A visit is very biblical. 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. A visit 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 visits 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 visits are 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 visit about program specifics. Resist these temptations. From recent statistics we can assume the vast majority of families we will be visiting 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 visit, 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 visit starts which families are engaged in the life of the parish. We encourage you to invite these engaged families into a roll of accompaniment, asking them to take on the role of a coach or catechist, to model and make disciples of the other families.

# PLANNING

- Decide if you will be visiting with 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 how and where you will meet. We encourage in-person visits, but they can also be done 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 visits.

# 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 shut 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.” If it is the first time, 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 visit. Begin with a prayer. You can use the one provided on the Visit Guide, or one of your choosing. The Visit 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 visit will be guided by intentionally designed questions that can be found on the Visit Guide. These are a guide and can be adapted to your people. Keeping in mind that the visit 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 Visit Guide or one of your choosing.

Take some time after the visit 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.

# VISIT 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.



# PATHWAYS

