

WITNESSES

Leader Guide



Faith and Family Life
Catholic Ministries

AN INVITATION

You have been invited to accompany your families as they are introduced to holy examples of faith! In today's world, it can be difficult to find role models who point us towards goodness and holiness. Saints are regular people from all walks of life who were committed to following Jesus' example. Their witness is a living reminder and a daily invitation for families to walk in their footsteps as they, too, are called to be saints.

Becoming a saint begins by inviting grace into our daily experiences, allowing God to lead us and make our ordinary lives extraordinary. One way to do this is by making ordinary moments intentional opportunities for faith conversations. Since we all have to eat everyday, cooking and sharing a meal becomes a great place to start. Each Family Meeting includes a recipe that will help to gather the families and set them up to share an intentional conversation.

The testimonies of life and death for the Lord offered by the saints and martyrs have been authentic sequentiae sancti Evangelii, Gospel passages capable of proclaiming Christ and eliciting and nourishing faith in him. (Directory for Catechesis 99)

A FEW TIPS

- By reading and experiencing the content yourself, you will be best equipped to accompany this program. We recommend first becoming familiar with the material before implementing it.
- Families can be placed in small groups of 3-4 families to share this journey with. Families can learn from each other as they recount their Family Meeting experiences. Companion Families can weave together these individual families into a small church community.
- *Witness* is designed to be led at-home, and can be accompanied by the At-Church Content. The At-Church Content includes 2 Sessions for parents and children. If you are introducing families to ongoing formation resources for the first time, be sure to begin with the Blend Session.
- Check in with families regularly using our Family Follow Through system available on Martha or as a PDF. This helps with accountability. Share photos from the Family Follow Throughs in your bulletin, newsletter, emails, or bulletin boards.

AT-HOME CONTENT

Over 8 Family Meetings, families will cook a recipe related to the life of a saint and learn about a gift of the Holy Spirit lived out in their lives. Each Family Meeting includes: a gathering ritual, opening prayer, check-in question, recipe to cook together, teaching, and closing prayer. Each meeting is designed to take 20-45 minutes.

Families will begin by praying a Litany of Saints they create together in the first meeting. When families continually share in rituals of their faith, they can become more grounded in Christ and united as a family. This gathering ritual will help provide a regular rhythm to begin Family Meetings. The check-in is meant to get the conversation started between family members. The question is loosely based on the theme, and is one that is easy to answer.

In each meeting, families will discuss how a specific saint lived out a gift of the Holy Spirit in their life and how they can be an example for us. We hope families will continue to celebrate the saints on their feast day by cooking the recipe together and having intentional conversations of faith about their holy lives. To end each Family Meeting, a prayer is included for families to pray together.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Family Meeting	Theme	Activity
1	-Called to be a Saint -Feast Days	-Make a Birthday Cake -Light the birthday candles to remember the light of Christ that lives in you.
2	-St. Teresa of Calcutta -Wisdom	-Recipe: Traditional Indian Curry
3	-Sts. Peter and Paul -Understanding	-Recipe: "Tent" Snack
4	-St. Katharine Drexel -Knowledge	-Recipe: Cornbread
5	-St. Joseph -Counsel	-Make and decorate sugar cookies -Create a "feast" with an assortment of goodies and decorate your St. Joseph Table. -Share your extra goodies with a neighbor, friend, or someone in need.
6	-St. Michael the Archangel -Fortitude	-Recipe: St. Michael's Bannock
7	-St. Maximilian Kolbe -Piety	-Recipe: Polish Kielbasa Meal
8	-St. Lucy -Fear of the Lord	-Recipe: "S" shaped Sweet Buns

AT-CHURCH CONTENT

It is important to have families gather periodically throughout the *Witness* process. The goal of gathering is to:

- Find out what is going well and what families are struggling with in the Family Meetings.
- To encourage, deepen, and support their experience of the Family Meetings with any tips, inspiration, or information.
- To meet and hear from other families on a similar journey. There is wisdom in any room of families, especially parents!
- To give children a positive and meaningful experience at-church.
- To pray together - for each other and for the entire community.

This resource has been provided to support you in facilitating family Sessions held at-church throughout the *Witness* experience. The Sessions are designed to have parents and children together. There is plenty of content to fill a 1-1.5 hour time frame in the Sessions. Session 1 is designed to be used between Family Meeting 4 and 5. Session 2 is designed to be used after Family Meeting 8. If you are introducing families to ongoing formation resources for the first time, be sure to begin with the Blend Session available before Session 1.

There are supplies that need to be pulled together to help bring these Sessions to life. We have given you supply lists. We cannot overemphasize the impact of simple but beautiful decor, great hospitality, and intimate prayerful spaces. Your attention to detail tells everyone this is important, we prepared for you!

We realize families are in different places and stages in their own faith journeys. We have written sessions we feel best take into account today's families. It is our hope that these Sessions meet them where they are at and slowly lead them into something more. Feel free to scale the material up or down. It is most important that families leave with a positive experience of Church and community, feeling like they have a place in it. We have included 2 family Sessions for the *Witness* resource. In addition, you may also want to have a gathering inviting families to bring a favorite family recipe to share. A simple potluck with prayer, food, conversation, and a couple games is a great community builder.

ACCOMPANIMENT TEAM NEEDS

We realize each of our directors have different gifts; some are wonderful teachers, some are storytellers, others are better facilitating small groups, some are gifted in finding others to present material. Use your strengths to lead your family Sessions, and look for others who can take the pieces you are not as confident in. It takes a team!

Facilitator:

- Choosing a facilitator to lead your Sessions as an MC from the front is an important decision. There will be other voices like witnesses, but it is necessary to have a central person to be the stabilizing and guiding voice in the group. They will introduce and weave together the content for each Session. This person should be warm, engaging, confident, and it helps if they have a good sense of humor. This person needs to be open and non-judgmental. It will be their voice that will help the group grow together.

Companion Families:

- We recommend placing 1 companion family in each small group of 10 families, if possible. This will help provide a relatable connection to the parish community. Companion families will focus on building relationships and supporting the facilitator in guiding the at-church Sessions. Make sure companion families feel comfortable with the flow of each Session. Leave time at the end of each Session with the companion families to evaluate the experience. To make this a great experience for all, we must be checking in regularly and making any needed changes as soon as possible. Invest in time with your companion families. Having a strong team of people committed to the same mission helps everyone. Offer time to get to know one another, provide skills training, and spend time in prayer together. We want our families to feel like they are being invited into a group that has been preparing for them and enjoys each other.

Hospitality:

- Hospitality is about much more than setting out cookies and water bottles. Great hospitality is the root for the growing that will take place. Having a team that interacts well together, and welcomes you into their community, will help the families get comfortable almost immediately. This will produce greater engagement in the Sessions. This type of hospitality requires the facilitator and companions to become friendly with the families before they ever begin. It includes being “real” through sharing, vulnerability, and laughter from the minute your families arrive.

- How the room “feels” is also an important part of the hospitality recipe. Covered tables, simple centerpieces, and the glow of a few candles will encourage the families to lean into the conversation, like a great dinner party. Take the time to set the room in advance, so that families walk into a space that feels prepared for them. A prayer table up front with changing images each Session can also be a small voice speaking into the room. Find creative people in your community who have a heart for families and let them loose to work their magic.

Intercessors:

- Having intentional intercessors who are praying for your families and your ministry is an important step to staying on mission. Prayer always needs to be integral to the work we do. People in your parish community who take the time to talk with Jesus often and who understand the struggles and difficulties facing families are perfect to help in this role. These prayer warriors can be organized as a group, or can individually come before God for the needs of the parish families each day. Prayer can be specially centered around this time of growing as disciples.

WITNESSES

FAMILY FOLLOW THROUGHS

Time with family is precious. Following through with this family experience tells your child this is important. With your child, please complete the following tasks after each meeting to turn in.

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Family Meeting 1: Email a picture of the birthday cake you made before you enjoyed it as a family.

Family Meeting 2: Email a picture of the traditional Indian curry you made in honor of St. Teresa of Calcutta before you enjoyed it as a family.

Family Meeting 3: Email a picture of the tent with fish you created in honor of Sts. Peter and Paul before you enjoyed it as a family.

Family Meeting 4: Email a picture of the cornbread you made in honor of corn's place in soul food and Native American culture and cooking before you enjoyed it as a family.

Family Meeting 5: Email a picture of the St. Joseph Table you created in honor of St. Joseph before you enjoyed it as a family.

Family Meeting 6: Email a picture of the St. Michael's Bannock bread you made in honor of St. Michael before you enjoyed it as a family.

Family Meeting 7: Email a picture of the Polish meal you made in honor of St. Maximilian Kolbe before you enjoyed it as a family.

Family Meeting 8: Email a picture of the sweet buns you made in honor of St. Lucy before you enjoyed them as a family.