

The proverbial return of “back to school” naturally turns our attention to the value of education. However, education is not solely or even primarily the task of our local school district or catholic school. The family has been given the title of the “first school” and refers to parents as the “first educators.” Parents bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule.” Thus, they create a home well suited for education in the virtues” (CCC 2223). They have the privilege of evangelizing their children and should educate them in the faith from the children’s “earliest years” (CCC 2225-2226).

What are we doing as parents in our own homes to really fulfill the role as first educators of our children?

Here are some practical “back to school” suggestions to help you get started.

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Eat dinner together as a family

We rarely think about it, but sharing a meal is one of the most intimate and relational acts. The beginning of a new school year is one of the busiest times of the year. Sports practices, band practice, debate club, and all sorts of extracurricular activities compete with family time and the bonds we may have formed throughout summer vacations and camping. However, sharing a meal can be a powerful unifying force. At meal time, kids can learn social skills and the essential skill of conversation. Conversation is a truly human skill which is being lost. Many students are unable to form relationships because they have lost the art of engaging in conversation. Many will not make eye contact, cannot carry on a conversation, and are lost without their phones. They are highly connected but quite lonely.

Attend Mass on Saturdays/Sundays as a family

School brings a lot of competition for time. Sports and other events quickly fill our weekends. Make Mass a priority. There is no greater investment that you can make in your child’s faith than to keep the Sabbath holy, no matter your schedule.

Pray together as a family daily or weekly

Pope Francis has consistently reiterated the necessity of a strong family for both the individual and society. One key to family unity is prayer. Prayer in the home does not have to be complex. In fact, Pope Francis teaches that “...we need simplicity to pray as a family: simplicity is necessary! Praying the Our Father together, around the table, is not something extraordinary: it’s easy. Praying the Rosary together as a family is very beautiful and a source of great strength! It is also important to pray for one another! The husband for his wife, the wife for her husband, both together for their children, the children for their grandparents....praying for each other. This is what it means to pray in the family and it is what makes the family strong: prayer.”

Make sure your child is enrolled in your Parish Religious Education

While you are enrolling in all those other extracurricular activities, don’t forget about religious education. Be sure you are preparing your children to receive the sacramental preparation, whether it be First Communion, First Reconciliation, or Confirmation.

Attend Parish Faith Formation events

Check out your parish’s events and offerings to determine how you and your children can deepen your faith and learn about God. We cannot give what we do not have.

Ask Father!

When your children ask hard questions to you about God, encourage them to ask your parish priest to get the answers. This is another great way to help kids learn how to converse. It is also a great way to get to know your priest.

Religious books and non-religious books

Encourage your children to read religious books and non-religious books this school year. One suggestion for a religious book for teens is *Made For More* by Curtis Martin. It is a simple explanation of the faith which is highly engaging and intellectually formative. This mixing and matching of books helps integrate faith in a natural way into family life and helps to keep faith from being just something families do on Sundays.

We pray these suggestions will help you and your family grow in faith this school year!