

FROM BAPTISM TO MISSIONARY DISCIPLE

Forming Missionary Disciples Through the Domestic Church

A Framework for Lifelong Formation in the Diocese of Salina

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19)

INTRODUCTION

Every Great Story Begins at Home

Every great story of discipleship and conversion begins somewhere, and for the Christian, that beginning is often the family.

Before a child ever enters a religion classroom or participates in a parish program, they are already learning what faith looks like in the home. They learn trust before they can speak, prayer before they can read Scripture, and love before they can define it. Long before they understand doctrine, they encounter God through the ordinary witness of family life.

Often it is said that "faith is caught before it is taught".

Because of this, the Church has always recognized parents as the primary educators of their children in the faith. The parishes, Catholic schools, clergy, catechists, and youth ministers exist not to replace that vocation, but to support it.

This framework grows from that important understanding. It is a vision for accompanying families as they form their children from Baptism to being lifelong missionary disciples. While the Church's and parents' roles differ, our mission is a shared one—helping every person encounter Jesus Christ and grow as His disciple. The sections that follow describe how that journey unfolds from the baptismal font through every stage of life.

Why Now?

The mission of the Church has never changed, but every age must rediscover how to live it.

Today, families often desire to hand on the faith but feel overwhelmed or isolated. Young people continue searching for meaning and belonging in a culture marked by distraction and declining trust, especially in institutions. Yet this is not a moment for discouragement. It is a moment for renewal.

Jesus Christ continues to call disciples. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church. Families still desire faith. Young people still seek God and ask deep questions.

The restoration of the Sacraments of Initiation provides an opportunity not simply to adjust their timing, but to renew our understanding of formation itself. It invites us to move beyond programs and milestones toward a lifelong vision of discipleship that begins at Baptism.

Rather than asking how we prepare children for sacraments, we begin asking how we, the Church, can accompany families in becoming missionary disciples.

This is the question that shapes everything that follows.

The Heart of Catechesis

At the center of the Church's mission is one person—Jesus Christ.

The Church exists to bring people into communion with Him. Catechesis, therefore, is not simply instruction or religious education. Its purpose is formation in relationship with Christ.

Scripture becomes encounter with the living word of God. Prayer becomes relationship where both speak and listen. The sacraments become living grace. Service becomes participation in Christ's mission to love and serve others as we share our faith.

Knowledge remains essential, but it is never sufficient on its own. Faith must lead to conversion, worship, and lifelong discipleship.

The fundamental question for every ministry becomes simple--Are we helping people know Jesus Christ and become missionary disciples with Him?

Everything else serves that goal.

The Domestic Church

The family is the first place where faith is lived and transmitted.

Before children learn from a catechist, they learn from parents. They learn how to pray, how to forgive, how to love, and how to trust God by watching daily life in the home.

For this reason, the Church calls the family the Domestic Church.

Parents are not assistants in formation. They are its foundation. The parish religious education program exists to strengthen, not replace, their role.

When families pray together, faith becomes real. When forgiveness is lived at home, mercy becomes visible. When Sunday Mass is central to family life, children learn that God matters.

The Church needs to help families as they strive to build their Domestic Church at home.

Christian Initiation

The Sacraments of Initiation form one unified entrance into the Christian life.

Baptism makes us children of God. Confirmation strengthens us with a special outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and sends us on mission. The Eucharist nourishes us with Christ Himself.

These sacraments are not isolated events or achievements. They are the beginning of a beautiful lifelong journey.

Grace is not a reward for maturity. Grace is what makes spiritual maturity possible.

The restoration of the Sacraments of Initiation invites the Church to recover this vision. A vision where formation is not preparation for a moment of grace, but a life within grace.

This leads to the Church's ancient practice of mystagogy.

Mystagogy is the ongoing process of learning to grow into and live the graces of the sacraments we have received. It is not a stage that begins after formation or once preparation is complete. Rather, it begins on the very day a sacrament is celebrated.

A married couple spends a lifetime growing into the grace they received on their wedding day, learning each day how to love more faithfully, forgive more freely, sacrifice more generously, and build a home centered on Christ.

In the same way, a deacon or priest does not leave ordination having reached the fullness of his vocation. Through continued prayer, study, ministry, and formation by the Holy Spirit, he is continually transformed, allowing the grace of Holy Orders to shape him more deeply into the image of Christ the Servant and the Good Shepherd.

In both vocations, the sacrament is not the end of formation but the beginning of a lifelong journey of cooperating with God's grace. Mystagogy is, therefore, not an optional final step in formation but the very heart of Christian life—continually entering more fully into the mystery of Christ through the grace already given in the sacraments.

The Christian journey does not end when we receive the graces of the sacraments. It begins there.

The Formation Pathway

Formation is one continuous journey that unfolds across life. It can be understood in four movements, with the understanding that formation is successful only when it leads to friendship with Christ and to a life shaped by His Gospel.

Belong (Baptism through Kindergarten)

Children first learn that they belong to God, to their family, and to the Church. Faith is first witnessed in the home. Families are accompanied by their parish as they become the domestic church.

Receive (Grades 1–3)

Children receive the final two Sacraments of Initiation and discover that grace is a gift.

Mystagogy (Grades 4–Lifelong)

Children begin living within the grace they have received, and they learn more about the faith as they grow in their relationship with God.

Discipleship and Mission (Grades 9–Lifelong)

Young people grow their relationship with God and begin discerning vocation and living as missionary disciples. They are accompanied in this phase by parents, pastors, youth ministers, and trusted adults who help them discover the joy of being a disciple of Jesus through catechesis, relational ministry, and small group discipleship.

The Disciple We Hope to Form

The Church hopes for more than well-formed students. She hopes for saints.

We hope young people will know Jesus Christ personally, love the sacramental life of the Church, live as disciples in daily life, serve with a missionary heart, and remain committed to lifelong growth.

Formation is successful only when it leads to friendship with Christ and a life shaped by His Gospel.

Accompaniment

Jesus formed his disciples through relationship.

He walked with them, listened to them, taught them, and loved them.

The Church continues this pattern today. Formation is not only instruction. It is accompaniment.

Parents, pastors, catechists, teachers, and youth ministers all share in this mission. Disciples are formed through relationships, not programs or curricula alone.

For this reason, every young person should have at least one faithful adult who accompanies them in the journey of faith.

Small groups strengthen this accompaniment by creating space for prayer, friendship, Scripture, and honest conversation.

Formation becomes lasting when it is relational and modeled on the ministry of Jesus.

One Mission, Many Roles

The Church forms disciples through the shared mission of parents, grandparents, pastors, catechists, teachers, youth ministers, and volunteers. Each has a unique role in accompanying others in faith, yet all are united in one mission—making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Parents-Primary educators of the faith and the first and most powerful witnesses to the faith and God's love.

Grandparents-Witnesses across generations and faithful prayer warriors for grandchildren.

Parish-A family of families and the spiritual home of discipleship

Catholic Schools-Place where young people gain a deepening understanding of faith

Parish Catechesis-Place where young people gain a deepening understanding of faith

Youth Ministry-Accompanying youth as they become disciples of Jesus and deepen their faith.

Small Groups-Relational formation where people can grow in relationship to Jesus.

Service-Faith expressed in action and the missionary spirit of Jesus

Together, these roles form a unified team to help young people become disciples.

Moving Forward Together

Every parish in the Diocese of Salina is different in size, structure, and resources. This diversity is a strength. It allows the Church to live the same mission in many ways. This framework does not require uniform programs. It calls for shared direction.

Each parish is invited to discern how to live this vision faithfully within its own context while remaining united in mission.

The Invitation

This framework is an invitation to renewed mission.

It calls us to see Baptism not as the beginning of a program, but as the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith. It calls us to see formation as a shared responsibility of the entire Church. Above all, it calls us to accompany families rather than simply provide programs for them.

One day, a young family will bring their child to the baptismal font. They will make the same promises countless parents have made before them, and the Church will make the same promise in return—to walk with them as a family in faith.

From that day forward, the parish becomes a companion to the family on the journey. Through parent formation, family gatherings, prayer opportunities, and community, the Church supports parents as they grow in their vocation of marriage and build the Domestic Church within their home. Just as importantly, families begin building relationships with other families who are walking the same path.

As children reach the age of reason, the parish partners with parents in preparing them for Reconciliation, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. Together, parents and the parish help children encounter God's mercy, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and be nourished by Christ in the Eucharist. The parish then rejoices as a family when these young disciples complete their Christian initiation.

The journey does not end there.

Having received the fullness of the Sacraments of Initiation, young people begin the years of mystagogy, learning about and living in the grace they have received. Whether through parish catechesis or Catholic schools, they continue to grow in their understanding of the faith, develop a life of prayer, learn the virtues, discover the gifts and fruits of the Holy

Spirit, and find their place within the life and mission of the Church. Parents remain essential partners throughout this stage, continuing to form the faith that is lived each day at home.

As young people enter junior high and high school, formation naturally takes on a more intentional focus on discipleship. Alongside continued catechesis, they are accompanied by youth ministers, mentors, and other faithful adults who help them grow through prayer, service, leadership, and small-group discipleship. They begin to discern God's call for their lives and discover that they are not only recipients of the Gospel but also participants in the Church's mission. They are sent to bring the light of Christ into their schools, friendships, workplaces, and communities.

Formation does not end with high school graduation.

The Church continues to walk with young adults as they discern their vocation, prepare for marriage, the priesthood, religious life, or a generous single life, and continue growing as missionary disciples. Throughout every stage of life, the Church remains a companion, inviting each person into deeper communion with Jesus Christ and continued participation in His mission.

Our hope is that every family in the Diocese of Salina experiences this lifelong journey of faith. A journey that begins at the baptismal font, is strengthened through the Sacraments of Initiation, matures through lifelong formation and discipleship, and ultimately leads each person to the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.

Our hope is that they will find a Church ready to keep that promise.

A Church where families belong.

Where faith is lived.

Where disciples are formed.

Where Christ is encountered.

And where no one walks alone.