

Catholic

UPDATE

LIGUORI
PUBLICATIONS
ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999

800-325-9521

AUGUST 2014
C1408A

Now from
LIGUORI
Publications

WWW.LIGUORI.ORG • WALKING WITH YOU.

FAITH-SHARING IN THE FAMILY

When we engage in conversations of faith, we respond to the call to evangelize. *By Bob and Maggie McCarty*



© SHUTTERSTOCK

EDITOR: JOAN McKAMEY

© 2014 LIGUORI PUBLICATIONS. PHOTOCOPYING PROHIBITED.

When our grandson, Thomas, was younger, he loved maps. Once we were lying on the floor looking at a map of the world. Thomas asked all sorts of questions: “Pop Pop, where do I live?” “Pop Pop, where do you live?” and “Pop Pop, where does God live?”

Recognizing a teaching moment, we explained that God lives everywhere, is all around us—and also lives inside each of us. Taking Thomas’ hand, we placed it on his heart and then on each of our hearts and told him God lives within all of our hearts. “Ah,” Thomas said, and then continued, “Pop Pop, where’s the beach we go to for vacation?”

EXPERIENCE-RICH, LANGUAGE-POOR

Children have active religious imaginations. They think about God and God questions but don’t always have ways to express them or people they’re comfortable asking. The Gallup Organization reports that one in three teenagers before age fifteen reports a “significant” personal experience of God. This raises two important questions: (1) Do young people have the language to speak about this experience? (2) Do they have a faith community that helps them integrate that experience into their lives? The research illustrates that young people are experience-rich and language-poor, especially when it comes to experiences of God.

Parents and other adults play key roles in helping young people grapple with, name, and grow in their God experiences. Yet many of us grew up in families where faith was considered a personal experience, and we may have never heard others in our home speak of their faith. We know now that the most effective way to foster the faith of the adolescent and child is to have an active partnership among parents, parish, and schools.

COMMUNICATING FAITH

We must develop our own ways to speak of faith and how it impacts our daily lives. Our friend, Jeanne, a single mom, has four children. She recently told us how upset she feels when her kids argue about going to church, making her late for Mass.

Jeanne told us how hard her life is and how important her faith is. She considers the time spent at Mass the most important hour of her week. Praying to God, receiving the Eucharist, and surrounding herself with other people of faith all give her the strength to face the challenges of her life.

Jeanne asked us how to make her kids want to go to Mass. We asked her, “Have you told them how you feel?” “No,” she said, “that never occurred to me. I don’t think I’d know how. I just assumed that my kids knew how important my faith is to me.”

The reality is that our children don’t know the importance of our faith unless we tell them. Jeanne’s story is *our* story. She didn’t think she knew how to talk to her kids about faith, but her story was so compelling and her passion so sincere, we were certain her kids would respond. And respond they have! They stopped arguing about going to Mass, and even the older ones join her for Mass when they’re home from college.

ANSWERING IMPORTANT WHYS

The children in our lives need to hear from us about our own faith. They’re looking for role models and mentors to show them in word and action how faith works in the lives of faith-filled adults. They learn from us, and they can’t do that unless we, too, are able—and willing—to articulate our faith.

As adults, we need to know our own answers to the following questions as a starting point for sharing our faith and having faith conversations:

- *Why am I Catholic?*
- *Why do I go to Mass on Sunday?*
- *Why is Jesus important to me?*

The two of us have many reasons for being Catholic. We were both raised Catholic, our extended families are Catholic, and no other denomination holds the same attraction for us. We love the sacraments, our sacramental theology, and our tradition. Catholicism gives us a language for our experiences of God.

We love Catholic social teaching. No other religion has the body of doctrine and tradition around social justice as Catholicism does.



© SHUTTERSTOCK

We're proud of the Church's centuries of service—from universities to hospitals. We're a Church of great cathedrals and great soup kitchens. We are Catholic Charities. You don't get that anywhere else.

Jeanne's story gets to the heart of why the Mass is so important to us. Spending time with God, hearing sacred Scripture, partaking of Eucharist, and being surrounded by a community of disciples are all essential to our faith. We like going to Mass.

We try to model our lives on the life of Jesus. Jesus taught us about loving one another, caring for the less fortunate, honoring God, loving our families, and being people of compassion, forgiveness, and justice. At the end, Jesus died for us, and his sacrifice has brought us everlasting life. Jesus' disciples, beginning with the early apostles and continuing today, tell the story of the Messiah in both word and action.

GOING DEEPER

Children ask all sorts of questions, including questions of faith. Questioning doesn't signal a loss of faith. Rather, questions are a sign that a person is ready to go deeper.

At a conference in Texas, a young woman asked Bob for a few minutes of his time. She feared she was losing her faith because she had so many questions about religion. Her family had taught her it's a sin to question one's faith. She was afraid to articulate her questions for fear it was sinful. She was so relieved to realize she was moving from childhood faith into the faith of young adulthood. She was going deeper.

Faith questions are signs that our children are trying to integrate faith into their own belief system, and the best place for them to ask these questions is within the context of family. It's equivalent to how, at Christmas, we eventually move our children from the Santa Claus story to the deeper reality of the Incarnation and the Jesus story. Our children's questioning is a signal that they want to go deeper.

TALKING TECHNIQUES

Learning simple and practical techniques will help you get started making your faith conversations richer. Since young people are experience-rich but language-poor, use analogy or contrasting images to foster your conversation with them. For example, ask: *Is your faith more like ...a pillow or a rock? ...planting a garden or mining for gold? ...mountain climbing or snowboarding?* These questions aren't about "right" answers—they're about providing images for a faith reality that's beyond mere words.

A PRAYER FOR PARENTS

Heavenly Father, you have revealed through Jesus our mission as Catholic Christians. Strengthen us for the work we do in your name. Grant us the wisdom to talk and teach about you. Make us a light on our children's path toward knowing you more fully. Bless our families and give us the grace to be powerful examples of Christian love to our children. Give us the words to express our love and gratitude to you. Help us to guide our children when they seek you in prayer. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

LISTEN AND PRAY!

Simple conversations can be sacred when we listen with open hearts. Listening to children is especially important! We must listen not only to words but also to tone and silences. Active listening joins one heart to another. As we listen, we can pray for wisdom and patience.



Prayer helps us celebrate, grieve, accept, and process a death, job loss, health crisis, or other rite of passage and opens the door to family conversation. Consider using the ACTS method:

- **Adoration**—Praise God.
- **Confession**—Name who we are and where we stand in God's presence.
- **Thanksgiving**—Name what we're thankful for.
- **Supplication**—Place our deepest needs and desires before God.

DIG DEEPER

How comfortable are you with God talk?

How well does your parish help young people integrate their experiences of God and life?

Where can you share your faith in conversations this week? Who might need you to listen as they share?

Use questions to spark prayer:

What are you grateful for/happy about today? Or, What are you sorry for today? Candid conversations help children understand that prayer is more than rote recitation.

Other questions can be patterned on these examples: *Is Jesus more ...near to you or far away from you? ...like a cheerleader or a coach? ...like a friend or a teacher? Is your prayer more ...talking or listening? ...words or actions? ...personal or communal? ...spontaneous or memorized? Do you experience God more ...in your room or in church? ...in people or in creation? ...in happy times or in sad times?* Remember, faith conversations aren't about right answers. They're about sharing insights.

One of our favorite techniques with young people is using "on a scale of one to ten" questions. These offer young people at least twenty different answers, since some will pick halves! For example, ask, "On a scale of one to ten..."

- How was your day?
- How was school?
- How was your weekend?
- How is your prayer life?
- How is your relationship with God?
- How important is your faith to you?
- How important is your parish to you?

And when they answer, you can ask, "What makes it a five or a seven or a two or a three and a half?" All this is about stimulating the conversation.

Open-ended statements work well with older children:

- The best thing about being Catholic is...
- My faith is most challenged when...
- I most strongly experience the presence of God in...
- I pray best when...
- God feels most absent or far away when...
- The person or experience that has most strengthened my faith...
- Jesus catches my imagination when he...

And perhaps the most challenging:

- As I consider this current event or issue, our faith tells me...



Parents must be ready to *really listen* to their children's answers and share their own. That's what makes it a conversation!

TALK AND LISTEN

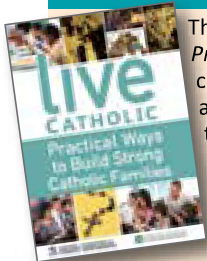
So, talk to the children in your life. Talk to them about how faith and God are important to you. Talk to them about how faith provides both a rudder and a guide—in good times and bad. Ask them about their experiences and listen to their answers.

Engaging in God talk or faith talk can be a beautiful opportunity for adults and children to deepen faith together. In doing so, we're responding to the call to evangelize and share our faith, to share the Jesus story. Make God talk a regular and normal part of your family life. Both you and the children in your life will be richer for it.

Dr. Maggie McCarty is the executive director of the Office of Lasallian Education for the Christian Brothers Conference. **Dr. Bob McCarty** is the executive director of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. Bob and Maggie present workshops and retreats internationally and volunteer on the youth ministry team at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Fulton, Maryland. Their hobbies include rock climbing, camping, and, now, grandparenting!

**NEXT
ISSUE**
 From Worship
 to World
 (by Thomas
 Richstatter, OFM)

KEEP THE FAITH



This article comes from the DVD-CD set *Live Catholic: Practical Ways to Build Strong Catholic Families*. The DVD contains four short videos that empower parents to take an active role in growing their children's faith—from toddlers to teens. The CD-ROM has handouts and a leader guide for use in small-group sessions in parishes and Catholic schools.

To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

DVD: 60 minutes • 367916 • \$39.99

SUBSCRIBE TO CATHOLIC UPDATE:

Single 12-month subscription: \$18.00 • 2-9: \$12.00 ea. • 10-49: \$6.00 ea.
 50-99: \$5.40 ea. • 100-199: \$4.20 ea. • 200-299: \$3.60 ea. • 300-499: \$2.76 ea.
 500-999: \$2.40 ea. • 1,000 or more: \$1.80 ea.
 For bulk rates, all copies must be mailed to same address.

ORDER COPIES OF CATHOLIC UPDATE:

1,000 or more: 19¢ ea. • 500-999: 23¢ ea. • 400-499: 25¢ ea. • 300-399: 28¢ ea.
 200-299: 33¢ ea. • 100-199: 39¢ ea. • 10-99: 49¢ ea. • 1-9: 75¢ ea.
 For more information visit us at Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.
 Prices are subject to change.