

# Examples of Faith Form Youth

Greetings!

Catholic parents and grandparents everywhere wonder how to hand on the faith they have received. When a child is baptized, the parents promise to bring them up in the practice of the faith.

But how?

Interestingly, the social sciences tell us what parents have known for generations: actions speak louder than words. Researchers at the National Study of Youth and Religion (directed by Professor Christian Smith at the University of Notre Dame) tell us that the strongest determining factor in the faith practice of teens and young adults is the faith practice of their parents.

As we think about why this is the case, it may be helpful to consider the word *practice*. When we hear it in a religious context we think “Joe is a practicing Catholic” or “My cousin Ed was raised Catholic, but he no longer practices.” In this context, we might think about the word *practice* in the way that someone practices the cello.

## If you want to raise children in the practice of the faith, show them what it looks like.

Being Catholic is much more than a skill. It is a gift and an identity as a child of God. Even so, what if, as we think about forming children in the faith, we think about them as practicing being Catholic, that they might acquire the skills they need to live in the freedom of the children of God?

How can they acquire those skills?

They look to their first teachers as models of how they are to live.

This is one reason it is important to bring young children to Mass. The child under six is in a period of development that is marked by imitation. By watching parents, grandparents, and other significant adults, they learn when to sit, kneel, and stand. They learn to make the Sign of the Cross. They learn the responses even before they know the meanings of the words. At home they learn to say grace, to pray at bedtime, to say the Rosary.



Even very young children learn to practice the faith by imitating their parents and other adults in their lives.

When children grow older, they hunger for role models. It is good for them to see lots of examples of what mature faith looks like while they are in this stage because eventually they will need to discern what mature faith looks like for them. We only have to look at the variety of the saints to see that the path of discipleship is not monolithic. In offering them relationships with other adults who live out their faith on the soup line, in parish ministry, and by bringing the values of the Gospel into the world, we show them what is possible in their lives.

Ultimately, our example as parents will have the greatest impact. If you want to raise children in the practice of the faith, show them what it looks like. Take them to Mass. Pray in front of them, pray with them, pray for them. Feed the hungry. Forgive and then forgive again. Pope Francis says the family is a school of mercy. Go to Reconciliation. Read the Bible. When you see God at work in your life, tell your children. You may find that your example is more powerful than you expect.