

# VISIT

## *LEADER GUIDE*



Faith and Family Life  
Catholic Ministries

# AN INVITATION

You have been invited to lead and accompany a family on their faith formation journey. A great way to begin and continue the journey is by sitting down with each of your families for a 20-30 minute *Visit* to check-in and assess where they are along their path. This is meant to be genuine dialogue that facilitates an experience of feeling known and seen. Meeting a family where they are and establishing a relationship of trust will encourage their willingness to follow where you lead them.

The *Visit* can be transformational for your ministry. Inviting families into your office, providing them with hospitality, good conversation, listening from a place of love, and meeting them where they are can make all the difference. The *Visit* provides the perfect welcome to a family's faith formation experience!

*In this renewed awareness of her vocation, the Church is also re-envisioning catechesis as one of her works in a missionary going forth. This means being willing to seek out the glimmers of truth that are already present in various human activities, trusting that God is mysteriously active in the heart of the human being before this has been explicitly reached by the Gospel. In this sense, she will find ways to draw near to the people of our time, walking alongside them wherever they happen to be. Catechesis, moreover, forms believers for mission, accompanying them in the maturation of attitudes of faith and making them aware that they are missionary disciples, called to participate actively in the proclamation of the Gospel and to make the Kingdom of God present in the world: "The Church's closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; communion and mission are profoundly interconnected." (DC 50)*

*Dialogue is a free and gratuitous initiative, takes its cues from love, is not commensurate with the merits of its participants, is not binding, is for all without distinctions and grows in a gradual way. (DC 53)*

*In the time of the new evangelization, the Church desires that catechesis as well should accentuate this dialogical style, to make more easily visible the face of the Son who, as with the Samaritan woman at the well, stops to begin a dialogue with every human being in order to lead him or her with gentleness to the discovery of the living water (cf. Jn 4: 5-42). (DC 54)*

*For catechesis as well, "it means developing a pastoral dialogue without relativism, which does not negotiate one's Christian identity, but which seeks to reach the heart of the other, of others different from us, and there to sow the Gospel." (DC 54)*

# REFLECTION

A visit is very biblical. We would like to begin by inviting you to pray with a familiar passage from the Gospel of Luke and to reflect on how it can cast a vision for your ministry of accompaniment.

**Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" (Luke 24:13-19)**

We are all on a journey of faith, with the vast majority of what we experience never known by another person. We all carry and wrestle with so much. The families we serve are the same. In a world that values productivity over meaning, it is no wonder we can get caught up in the rat race of life. Our faith is essential, yet it may not feel as pressing as the other daily tasks that can engulf a family. The *Visit* is an opportunity to meet your families along the road as Jesus met the disciples. The disciples were walking away from Jerusalem feeling let down and disappointed by what they thought was going to happen with the Messiah. Many families we meet are also in the process of walking away from the Church, feeling disappointed and let down. Jesus does not let his disciples just walk away, he meets them along the road and shares in their concerns; he accompanies them.

Jesus knew exactly what was in their hearts, yet humbly asked them the simple question: What sort of things? We can hear him saying to us in our own wrestling, tell me about that. God cares about what we care about, he is not blind to our needs, nor dismissive of our struggles. We have a God that draws close to us and walks with us, prioritizing relationships above all things. We too have the opportunity to be the presence of God for the families we have been given the grace to accompany through a process of formation. We know how the story ends. Jesus first listened to them, which opened their hearts to listen to him. They invited him into their home, were transformed by the breaking of the bread, and were impelled to return to Jerusalem. This is the process of formation we are inviting families to enter. We meet them along the road, whatever direction they are walking, to listen and share with them. Then God willing, they will invite Christ to stay with them in their home, have their eyes opened by the breaking of the bread - the Mass, and have their lives turned back on the journey to the eternal Jerusalem - heaven.

It is our hope that the purpose of the *Visit* will always be to establish a relationship of trust and care for the families we have the privilege of serving. This is the work of the pre-catechumenate. We like to say the *Visit* is not an inquisition, rather focuses on an encounter that is conversational, not confrontational. With limited time and a task of evaluating engagement, there can be a temptation to jump to questions of frequency of religious practice or to make the visit about program specifics. Resist these temptations. From recent statistics we can assume the vast majority of families we will be visiting with have little to no regular practice of faith at-home or at-church and may just be looking to do the minimum. This is an opportunity for so much more. We are meeting them along the road like Jesus. Let's focus on their presence and create an experience they don't expect; one of hospitality and encouragement.

## PLANNING

Decide if you will be visiting with the parent/parents or including the entire family. If children are present make sure to not ask parents questions that would paint them in a negative light. Decide how and where you will meet. We encourage in-person *Visits*, but they can also be done over a video conferencing platform. You should schedule 30 minutes per family, knowing that it may go a little longer or shorter depending on how much they share. Be good stewards of their time in order to respect any other commitments they may have. Think about what Jesus would say if he was there. Allow that to guide your responses. This needs to be a positive experience! Send an email ahead of time to the families outlining your plans for the year and what you hope to accomplish through the *Visit*.

## GENERAL TIPS

Before they arrive, either in person or over a video conferencing platform, we invite you to say a little prayer for them and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time together. If in person and in certain senses online, the space you are in can contribute greatly to their experience. Space can allow people to open up or shut down depending on how comfortable they feel. If you can invite them to sit in a comfortable place, like on a couch or chairs not separated by a desk, it will help to break down the formal feeling of distance between yourselves. Privacy is key to honesty and the space you choose reflects the level of privacy that is afforded them. Especially online it is important that others are not walking by in the background or that you are not in a public place for others to open up and answer honestly. If you are in person we encourage you to offer some sort of hospitality if you are able, like water, tea, or coffee. Hospitality opens hearts and tells people you care about them for who they are before anything else happens.

Begin by welcoming the family. Introduce yourself and express your gratitude for the opportunity to get to know them better. Recognize that parents may feel a little nervous or apprehensive about being “interviewed.” If it is the first time, immediately let them know this is merely a chance to welcome them into this process and to get to know them and their family. This will help them be more at ease during your *Visit*. Begin with a prayer. You can use the one provided in the *Visit Guide*, or one of your choosing. The *Visit Guide* can be printed out for your convenience. Next, invite them to introduce themselves and each share one thing they love to do together as a family. A great way to grow in relationship is to show interest in what they are interested in, then they in turn will be interested in who you are interested in - Jesus. We can show our interest by how we listen and respond.

Active listening is a great way to show people we care about what they are sharing. Active listening involves watching for non-verbal cues to understand the meaning of what is being said, showing understanding through non-verbal cues like nodding and eye contact, paraphrasing back what the person shared in your own words according to your interpretation, and asking for clarification or adding comments where needed. Our language is also very important, both in what we say and how we hold ourselves. Above all we need to be kind in our speech. It is important to remember that something can be true, but not helpful in certain circumstances. It is said, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Our body language often communicates far more than our words as a response to what someone says. People need to be received in their communication to grow in trust. St. Francis so aptly teaches us to “seek to understand, before seeking to be understood.” We need to listen to understand and not just be waiting to respond. Even if someone says something we don't agree with, we should trust the process of formation and stay in a position of curiosity, remember “tell me about that.” Also, don't be afraid to appropriately share about yourself as well, while keeping the focus on the family. Vulnerability gives others permission to share honestly.

The rest of the *Visit* will be guided by intentionally designed questions that can be found on the *Visit Guide*. These are a guide and can be adapted for your families. Keeping in mind that the visit should be between 20-30 minutes asks as many questions as comfortably fit in that time. It may be helpful for you to answer the question first for yourself as this will help give them a direction and time to think of their own response. Silence is also ok, do not rush to fill the quiet space. To wrap up your time together thank them for their time and the opportunity to get to know them better. Ask if they have any questions for you. At the end of this PDF you will find some prints that explain each of the *Pathways* resources in parent friendly language. If you know what resources the families will be experiencing, it would be helpful to give the parents the corresponding PDF prints to take home. It will give them just enough information

to know what to expect. Especially if this is new to them, it will help prepare them to come knowing what to anticipate. Conclude by expressing the Church's desire to support their family in this time of formation and beyond, then conclude with the prayer that is provided in the *Visit Guide* or one of your choosing.

Take some time after the visit to write some notes in your database about the family that might be important as you minister to them. If you feel like going above and beyond, you can send them home with something tangible like a candle or a prayer card. Any handwritten cards you can send throughout the year on an anniversary or birthday are always a blessing and make a difference. This time spent with families has made a huge difference in the way parishes accompany families. You will continue to see the fruit of your investment. As you walk with others, know Jesus will be right beside you.

# VISIT GUIDE

for Families/Parents

## OPENING PRAYER:

*Lord, thank you for this opportunity to gather in your name and learn more about one another. We ask you to send the Holy Spirit upon us to guide our time together and give us the assurance that you are with us always. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*(Invite them to introduce themselves and each share one thing they love to do together as a family.)*

## QUESTIONS:

- How has your family been doing?
- What's been going well? What's been challenging?
- What are you looking forward to this year?
- Who has been an example of faith for you?
- How has your personal experience of faith been so far?
- Have you been able to have faith conversations at home? (This is the perfect time to tell them how you can help them with that with this process!)
- What are some of the things you worry about as parents?
- How can the Church better support you?
- Is there anything else you feel could be helpful to note?
- How can I pray for you?

## CLOSING PRAYER:

*God, thank you for the gift of the \_\_\_\_\_ family to our faith community. May they always be filled with your blessing and know that they belong to you. Give them strength and discernment as they journey through life together. Keep them safe from all harm and lead them forward in the hope of heaven. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*



• S E E K •

*Seek* is presented through at-church experiences and extended through at-home activities. Parents and children/teens meet separately and come together for the closing prayer. This experience is meant to feel like a small retreat in which parents and children/teens are renewed in a positive expression of faith.

Parents and children are invited to experience the kerygma, the good news of the Gospel again! To hear it, reflect on it, and share it with others on a similar journey.

Parents will experience the content and hands-on experiences as part of a small group. This will not be overwhelming, but instead a safe place to explore faith and life.

As parents are ministered to, their children/teens will enjoy fellowship with other children/teens as they participate in activities and teaching that follow similar themes, all aimed at pointing them to the love of Jesus.

Parents will engage in interactive prayer experiences with their children/teens at the end of each Session. The intimacy of God's nearness will be felt by all.

Families are encouraged to enter this experience open and hopeful, knowing they are held in prayer by our community.

“When you call me, and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart.”

-Jeremiah 29:12-13



*Root* is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. The material is meant to provide a foundation of faith for families to rest on. As families come to understand more about who God is, they can better build a relationship with him.

Parents are the biggest investment in their child's faith. *Root* is an investment into the faith of each parent. For many parents it may have been sometime since they engaged in the Scriptures and teachings of the Catholic faith. With fresh eyes many new insights will be revealed as they study the Creed.

*Root for Parents* is a reflection on the first part of the Catechism broken into Mini-Series and written in accessible language. Small group discussion with other parents, during at-church Sessions, will bring wisdom and practical life experience to the studying.

*Root for Teens*, while similar to the parent content, is written in teen friendly language. During the at-church Sessions, teens will participate in small group discussions and activities with other teens to prepare them for conversation with their parents before the closing prayer.

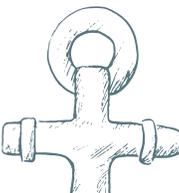
Parents will begin leading Family Meetings at-home with their children using the tools and resources provided in *Root for Children*. These gatherings will be simple opportunities to begin conversations of faith and a rhythm of shared prayer in the home.

Children/teens will benefit from learning about faith through both at-home and at-church experiences. Time with other children/teens and parents will continue to build community connections with parish families.

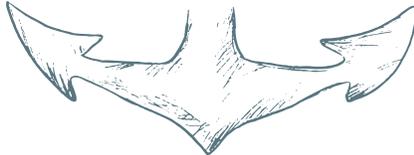
As families continue to invest in their faith together, they will be supported in prayer by our faith community and experience a God who is near.

“So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

-Colossians 2:6-7



# CLAIM



*Claim* is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. The material is designed to prepare parents who are planning to baptize an infant or very young child. Parents will be invited into a deeper understanding of the sacrament of Baptism, as they are welcomed into their parish family.

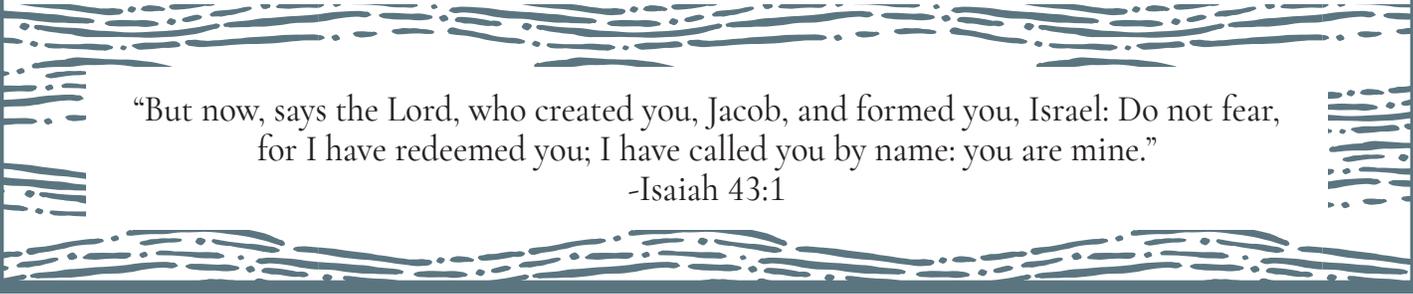
At-home Family Meetings include time for parents to reflect on how faith was passed on to them as a child. Parents will begin to think deeply about the image of God they want to share with their own child.

As parents learn more about the beautiful sacrament of Baptism, they will become better prepared to enter into the depth of God's invitation of new life for themselves and their child. Parents will be able to be present to the baptismal celebration as the key formers of their child and actively participate in the Rite.

At-church Sessions will be a time to interact with other parents. These valuable conversations and insights will let everyone know they are not on this journey alone. Parents are being invited into a community of families.

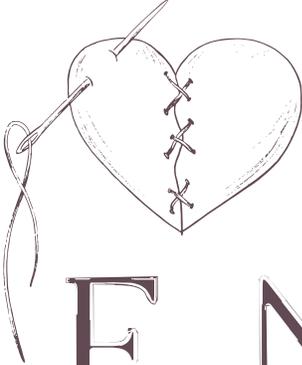
Godparents are also included in this process. Their influence is meant to last a lifetime. At-home and at-church experiences both include an opportunity to draw these chosen and well loved mentors into understanding their role. Godparents will be able to be present to the baptismal celebration as active participants who have a significant place in the life of the child.

As parents begin a journey of faith with their new family, they are being intentionally prayed for by our community. This is such a special time!



“But now, says the Lord, who created you, Jacob, and formed you, Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine.”

-Isaiah 43:1



# MEND

*Mend* is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. The material is designed to help families explore together the beauty of God's love and mercy as they help prepare a family member to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time.

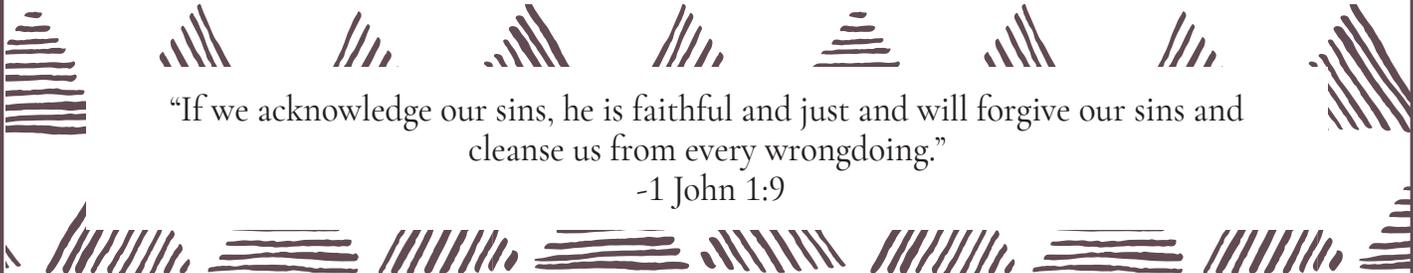
Home is the first place children learn to give and receive forgiveness. At-home Family Meetings provide an opportunity to have practical conversations about God's love and mercy amongst family members.

At-church Sessions will be important for parents. As parents prepare their child for the sacrament of Reconciliation, they too will process their own brokenness and God's unconditional mercy. Small group time with other parents will be useful as part of this inward journey.

Children will continue to learn and play alongside other children during at-church Sessions. Reflection, teaching, and hands-on experiences will reinforce the reconciliation themes.

Children preparing for Reconciliation will be ready to come to the sacrament with an open heart, an understanding of God's love and mercy, the knowledge of what sin is, the humility to acknowledge their own mistakes, the desire to do better, and the ability to make a good confession.

As children prepare to receive Jesus's love and mercy through the sacrament of Reconciliation, they are each being prayed for by name by our parish community.



"If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing."

-1 John 1:9



# NOURISH

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*Nourish* is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. The material is designed to help families explore together the gift of Jesus in the Eucharist, as they support a family member preparing to receive Communion for the first time.

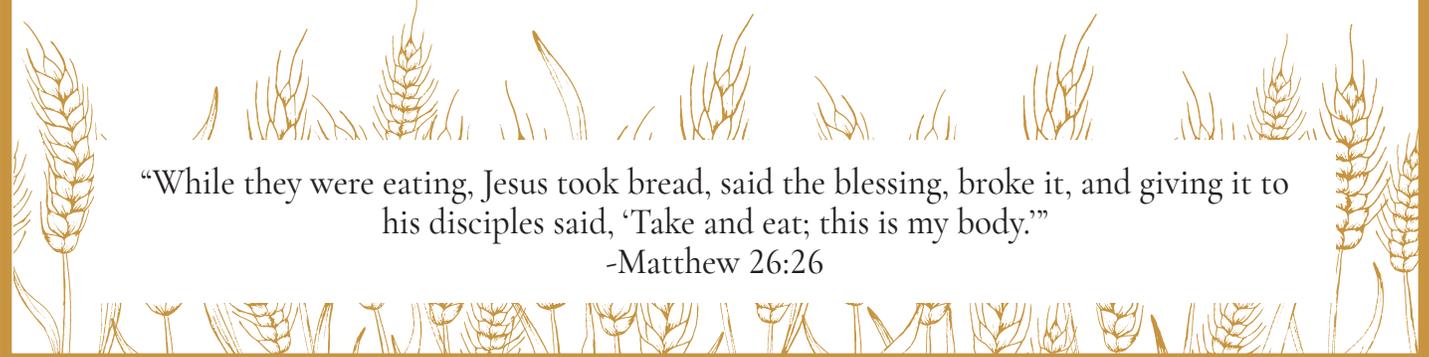
At-home Family Meetings invite families to participate in activities, teachings, and conversations aimed at helping better understand Jesus's gift of himself in the Eucharist. These experiences will help families engage the different parts of the Mass. As the first communicant prepares to receive Jesus, the whole family will be drawn in.

Parents will experience shared support during this special time as their own faith is invested in through at-church Sessions. Being a part of a small group of parents who are walking beside each other is invaluable.

Children will continue to grow beside one another during at-church Sessions. Hands-on experiential lessons will help children learn more about the sacrament they will soon be receiving.

Children receiving Eucharist will understand the gift that it is, coming to the altar well prepared and supported, as they receive Jesus into themselves.

As children prepare to receive Jesus through the sacrament of Eucharist, they are each being prayed for by name by our parish community.

A decorative border at the bottom of the page, consisting of a row of various wheat stalks and grain heads, rendered in a simple line-art style. The stalks vary in height and orientation, creating a textured, natural-looking edge.

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’”

-Matthew 26:26



# ZEAL



*Zeal* is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. The material is designed to help families develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit and a life of discipleship, as they support a family member preparing to receive Confirmation.

*Zeal for Children* at-home Family Meetings, led by parents, invite families to become familiar with the promptings and movements of the Holy Spirit. Activities that unpack how God comes to us in the Spirit under signs and symbols, like oil, water, fire, wind, light, and a dove will lead to conversations about how the Spirit wants to be close to us, give us new life, and guide us through faith.

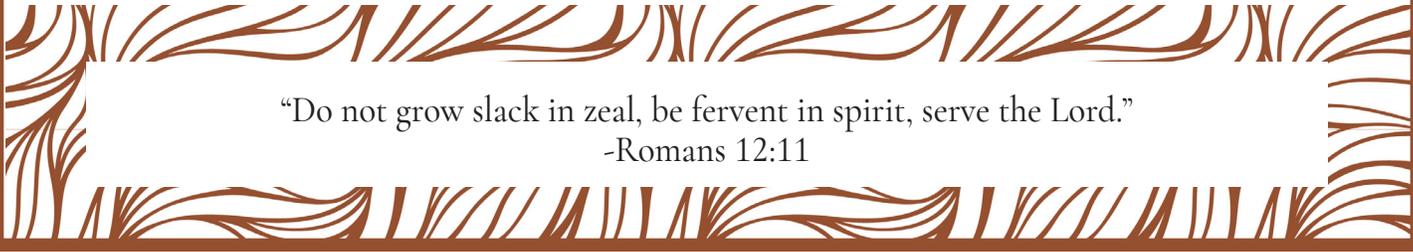
Parents will experience shared support during this special time as their own faith is invested in through at-church Sessions. Being part of a small group of parents who are walking beside each other will open their heart to the Paraclete in new ways.

Children will continue to grow beside one another during at-church Sessions. Hands-on experiential lessons will help children learn more about the sacrament they will soon be receiving.

*Zeal for Teens* at-home Mini-Series will help teens better understand the Holy Spirit and what it means to be a disciple related to their specific charisms. This will help them become more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.

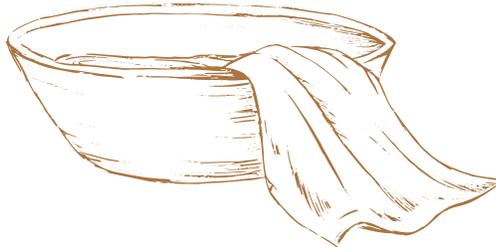
At-church Sessions, which include teens with parents, and teens with other teens in small groups, will facilitate conversations that lead to the integration of faith with daily life. They will learn from one another as they take up their role in the Body of Christ.

As children/teens prepare to be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of Confirmation, they are each being prayed for by name by our parish community.



“Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”  
-Romans 12:11

# MERCY



*Mercy* is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. Jesus's whole life was lived for others, and we are invited to follow him. Families will be challenged to live out the mercy they have been shown.

Through at-home Family Meetings the spiritual and corporal works of mercy are explored together. Families will have important conversations about serving and helping others, being a voice in the world for the less fortunate and seeking and finding Jesus everywhere. Parents can begin to form the social conscience of their children by engaging the materials provided.

Each Family Meeting includes a practical way for families to live out the works of mercy with each other and those around them. This concrete challenge allows parents and children to move from talking to action.

At-church Sessions also include hands-on service opportunities. Working together to bless others is a powerful experience as families become the hands and feet of Jesus.

Shared prayer during both at-church and at-home experiences invite families to experience the power of praying for others and their needs. Through prayer, families can stand with others in a special way.

As families focus on the needs of others, they are being prayed for by our community.

"If I therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet."

-John 13:14



# WONDER

*Wonder* is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. The parables Jesus told while he was on earth continue to provide insights into a life of faith. They are written in language that inspires and challenges families.

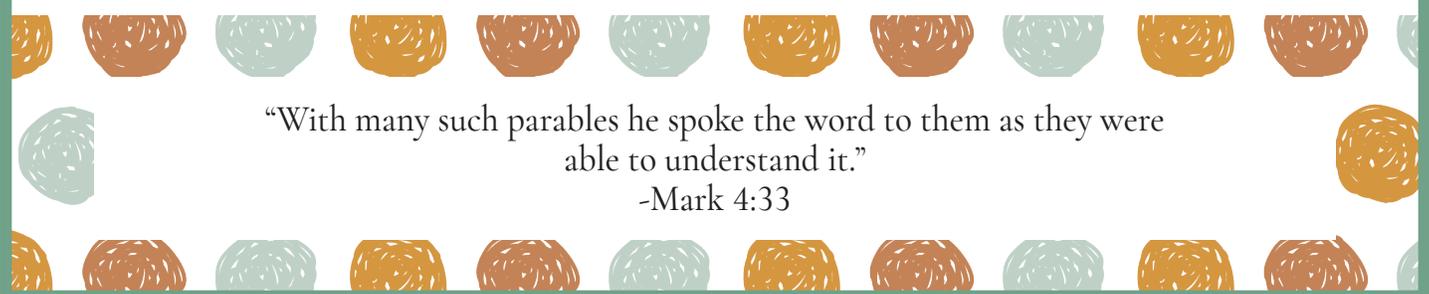
*Wonder* invites families to break open stories Jesus told and apply their deeper meanings to everyday life. The parables chosen focus on important moral themes and the prompts provided will lead to useful conversations.

At-home Family Meetings include time to develop the imagination needed for family members to insert themselves into the stories being told. Everyone will be reminded of the awe and wonder a life of faith requires.

Special attention is given to encouraging children to re-tell the parables in their own words. This is helpful as they are developing their own faith vocabulary. The materials include hands-on pop-outs to help with this.

At-church Sessions encourage community learning and fellowship. Families will share valuable insights as they participate in their own storytelling experiences.

As families spend time together sharing their faith and growing in wonder, they are being specially prayed for by our church community.



“With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it.”

-Mark 4:33

# WITNESSES

*Witness* is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. All of us are called to give witness to God's presence in our lives. Families will explore the lives of some incredible men and women who lived ordinary and extraordinary lives which gave bold witness to God's presence in their lives, these particular people are known as saints.

The lives of saints will be celebrated at home by cooking a simple dish as a family that connects to a particular saint's story. Time cooking together is meant to encourage conversation and teamwork.

At-home Family Meetings focused on a saint's life correspond to each dish. As families learn and discuss together they will be encouraged to look at their individual calls to sainthood.

At-church Sessions include a community cooking experience and are combined with the story of other saints and discussion time with other families. Families will leave inspired to live out the virtues of the saint that is celebrated.

Shared prayer both at-home and at-church will be a time to help bring families to the heart of Jesus.

Families are a strong witness of God's love in the world. Our community is praying for each of our families as they talk about the lives of some wonderful examples of holiness.

"Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Heavenly Father."

-Matthew 5:16



# QUEST

*Quest* is presented through both at-home and at-church experiences. The materials are designed to engage families in the adventure of a life of prayer.

The at-home Family Meetings each focus on a different type of prayer, as families learn how to talk to God in many different ways. *Quest* combines learning about prayer with the fun of participating in a family board game.

As parents and children form their own prayers, they work their way through the game board with a destination of reaching the summit, heaven! Prayer nourishes and sustains us along the way.

The at-church Sessions are focused on joining with other families to learn about the Church's greatest prayer, the Mass. Families are led through different parts of the Mass together, learning about the deeper meaning behind the beautiful and intentional work of the people.

Families will learn how to pray together and experience a living relationship with God, as they are being specially prayed for by our church community.

“Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.”  
-Romans 12:12

# BY HEART



*By Heart* is presented through at-home experiences. The resource is designed to help parents engage their children in the practice of learning and understanding traditional prayers, by heart.

*By Heart* helps families to know by heart well loved Catholic prayers. Praying these over and over gives children the confidence to know they have prayer close by when needed.

As the words of these prayers become known to parents and children, they can help lead to the spiritual practice of meditation. The words quiet the outside noise and allow God's voice to become more clear.

Families will also learn the history of each particular prayer. This gives some understanding of how and why this prayer was written. The goal is not merely memorization, but an understanding of the deeper meaning behind the words we are praying.

As families commit to praying together, our surrounding community lifts them up in our prayers.

“For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”  
-Matthew 6:21