



GRADE > PARENT PAGE

Parents have the unique responsibility for the education of their children; they are the first educators or catechists. They teach by their witness of the faith, through their values and attitudes, by their Christian example of love for Christ and his church. When children are baptized, parents accept the responsibility to raise their children in the practice of the faith . . . (National Directory for Catechesis 234-235)

Dear Parents,

In a special document entitled *Letter to Families*, Pope John Paul II wrote: “Parents are the first and most important educators of their own children, and they also possess a fundamental competence in this area; they are educators because they are parents” (16). You are the first and best role model for your child in these growing years. Your role as parent to love, teach, and lead your child to Jesus is a remarkable and noble vocation.

Junior High is a time of rapid change. Physically, cognitively, morally, emotionally, and socially your child is “crossing the bridge” between childhood and adulthood. It may be a longer journey for some than others because of each one’s unique pattern of development. However, there are some general developmental comments about this stage that can be made.

Your Child’s Faith Development

Seventh graders desire to be actively involved in and are open to service opportunities. They are willing to explore a personal relationship with God as they begin to define their own image of God. They look to the Church for the content and expression of faith. As a parent you will want to provide opportunities for service, community building, reflection, and activity. Seventh graders need both faith structure and flexibility in their religion classes and at home. These young people present particular challenges and opportunities to those who minister to them: you, as parents, as well as, those responsible for religious education in parishes, youth workers, and clergy. They have needs and wants that are unique to their situations and their levels of maturity in many areas. Adults who work with these young adolescents must be attentive to their special circumstances, needs, and attitudes.

Adolescents:

- † Are sensitive to physical changes and body image which greatly influences self-image
- † Begin abstract thinking
- † Use a more complex decision making process
- † Can reason based on possibilities not just experience
- † Can be self-conscious and critical
- † Want to belong
- † Begin to distance themselves at times from family influences and identify more closely with peers
- † Seek limited independence
- † Value friendships based on trust and loyalty
- † Reason at conventional levels
- † Resolve moral dilemmas based on expectations outside of self, i.e. peers, laws, parents, etc.

How You Can Help Your Child Grow In Faith

This year your child will continue to view the Catholic Church as a faith community given life by the Holy Spirit. He/she will come to realize that it is Christ's presence in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit which gives glory and praise to the Father and brings His redeeming love to all. As Catholics, we claim Jesus as the source of all teaching, sacramental life, our mission, and our ministries. As people of God we continue the mission of Jesus through active and committed participation in the life of the Church. Sacraments are specific faith actions of the Church empowered by Jesus through the guidance of the Spirit.

Your child will come to learn that building a strong and realistic concept of him/herself is based on Jesus' vision of being fully human. As God's children, created in His image and likeness, we are called to holiness and eternal life in God's Kingdom. Developing relationships with peers, parents, and other adults should be based on honesty, love, and respect, leading us into a deeper life and faith and a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church.

Here are several points that will assist you to help your child grow in his/her faith:

- ➔ Attend and participate in Sunday Mass as a family. Afterward, talk about some of the things mentioned in the homily. Once a month, allow your seventh grader to select an activity that the family can enjoy after Mass (i.e. dining at a favorite restaurant, attending a special movie, etc).
- ➔ Help your child identify ways to participate in your parish. Stress the importance of service to others by volunteering our time and talents. Mention the importance of tithing.
- ➔ Encourage your child (and his/her friends) to become involved in your parish Middle School Ministry Program or Youth Ministry Program. If your parish does not have a program, check with the Office for Evangelization of Youth and Young Adults at (804) 622-5112 or <http://www2.richmonddiocese.org/evangelization/> to locate a program close by your parish.
- ➔ Encourage your child to visit the diocesan website at www.richmonddiocese.org to become familiar with the Youth Ministry homepage to stay aware of diocesan and regional youth programs offered, <http://www2.richmonddiocese.org/evangelization/>.
- ➔ Discuss ways in which your child can spread the good news about Jesus (i.e. example to others, helping in the community/neighborhood, acts of kindness). Explain that Jesus works through us to reach all people.
- ➔ Help your child become familiar with a Church agency that serves the needs of the community (i.e. food bank, Meals on Wheels, local nursing home).
- ➔ Have your child surf the internet for information on the lives of Catholic saints to research his/her patron saint in preparation for Confirmation. Explain why you chose his/her name. Help your child identify a sponsor for the sacrament of Confirmation keeping in mind the special person must be a practicing Catholic in good standing in the Church.
- ➔ Purchase a teen's Catholic Bible as a gift for your child. Encourage him/her to pray often.

Learn all you can about our Catholic beliefs. Obtain a copy of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* <http://www.usccbpublishing.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1182> and use it as a reference book and adult learning resource. You can also check out the diocesan Christian Formation website (<http://www2.richmonddiocese.org/ocf/>) for other resources, both online and to order.