

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.  
To Grow in Faith  
Mid Atlantic Congress  
13 February 2015



“You have asked to have your children baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?”

So the priest or deacon speaks to parents at the door of the church at the very beginning of the Rite of Baptism for children. It is a serious responsibility, but all of us, as members of the Church, the Body of Christ, must strive to assist parents in their essential duty.

As the chief Shepherd of a world-wide archdiocese I have long recognized that concrete ways must be discovered to assist parents and their children in faith formation. It is one of the greatest responsibilities that we have. When I think back to my own religious education, I know that it began long before I set foot in the kindergarten of the parochial school. My parents and siblings taught me prayers, lessons about moral behavior, and much more.

There was a distinctive Catholic culture in my neighborhood and that contributed to my growth. We cannot presume the same for the children and young people entrusted to the AMS. Consequently, Forming Disciples for the New Evangelization, the Archdiocesan Religious Curriculum Guide (English and español) was devised and promulgated to assist our faithful in the accomplishment of this duty.

As you know, the Curriculum Guide clearly states what participants in military Catholic faith community religious education and youth ministry programs must know, understand and do at each grade level. In a faith community where PCS occurs continually, the faithful have a right to be inserted into a religious education system where everyone is on the same page all around the world.

The AMS Family Faith Assessment and AMS Family Faith Passport allow parents and youth/children to learn the Catholic faith online at home. The results are carried over from installation to installation in the faith passport. The assessment is a tool that

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adequately stimulates growth in knowledge and provides opportunities to further study on a particular topic.

Pope Francis has dedicated a number of recent discourses during his Wednesday audiences on the role of parents in the family.

“Mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centered individualism. ‘Individual’ means “what cannot be divided”. Mothers, instead, “divide” themselves, from the moment they bear a child to give him to the world and help him grow. It is they, mothers, who most hate war, which kills their children. It is they who testify to the beauty of life.”<sup>1</sup>

He continued: “A society without mothers would be a dehumanized society, for mothers are always, even in the worst moments, witnesses of tenderness, dedication and moral strength. Mothers often pass on the deepest sense of religious practice... It is a message that believing mothers are able to pass on without much explanation: these come later, but the seed of faith is those early precious moments. Without mothers, not only would there be no new faithful, but the faith would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth. And the Church is mother, with all of this, she is our mother!”<sup>2</sup>

Documents on catechetics stress the contribution of parents to the spiritual growth of their children by nurturing their intellectual, emotional, and physical growth. At baptism, the community promises to assist parents in this role.<sup>3</sup>

The religious behavior of the parents, whatever it may be, can be called an accurate predictor of religious performance of children. The *National Catechetical Directory* tells us that “parents catechize informally but powerfully by example and instruction”<sup>4</sup> and that “though the influence of peers and of adult catechists is important, catechetical programs are not intended to supplant parents as the primary educators of their children.”<sup>5</sup>

As I never fail to quote to those I confirm: “Preach the Gospel always and, when absolutely necessary, use words.” St. Francis of Assisi described well the environment that is incumbent on all of us to produce so that young and old can meet the Lord and learn to love Him.

The General Directory on Catechesis is a bit more prosaic: “The Christian community is the origin, locus and goal of catechesis. The proclamation of the Gospel always begins with the Christian community and invites to conversion and the following of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> That witness is even more effective when it is given by the parents. “It is

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Discourse at the General Audience, 7.I.15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. GDC, n. 221

<sup>4</sup> NCD, n. 212.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, n. 229.

<sup>6</sup> GDC, n. 254.

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deepened all the more when parents comment on the more methodical catechesis which their children later receive in the Christian community and help them to appropriate it. Indeed, ‘family catechesis precedes...accompanies, and enriches all forms of catechesis.’”<sup>7</sup>

Consider again what Pope Francis says about the father of a family. “The first need, then, is precisely this: that a father be *present* in the family.... He [should] be close to his children as they grow: when they play and when they strive,... when they are daring and when they are afraid, when they take a wrong step and when they find their path again; a father who is always present. To say “present” is not to say “controlling”! Fathers who are too controlling cancel out their children, they do not let them develop.

“A good father *knows how to wait and knows how to forgive* from the depths of his heart. Certainly, he also knows how to correct with firmness: he is not a weak father, submissive and sentimental. The father who *knows how to correct without humiliating* is the one who knows how to protect without sparing himself.”<sup>8</sup>

Personally, as the father of the Archdiocesan community, I certainly try to exercise the dimension of presence personally and through the visitation of the Auxiliary Bishops. I am also grateful for these occasions to thank catechists and others for what they do in the communities. Let me also praise the staff of the Evangelization Department. It represents one of the most brilliant stars in the AMS firmament: Dr. Mark Moitoza, the Vice Chancellor for Evangelization; Mr. José Amaya, the Director of Faith Formation; Ms. Margaret Betit, Associate Director of Evangelization and Digital Media; and Ms. Cassadra Bustamante, a very active and capable intern in that office.

They will tell you that I am not a very good father to them, because I am always absent! Perhaps if I had a deeper spirituality I could bi-locate, but that would be a drop in the bucket in this Archdiocese where the sun is always shining.

An added benefit to any catechetical program is the fact that all of us learn through teaching. Parents and educators in their mission build up the Church. Those who support good catechesis, not only fulfill their role as members of the body, but also grow in their own knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

In so many of our military communities, the scheduling of the celebration of the Eucharist is intimately linked to catechetical programs. I think of West Point and their catechesis on Sunday mornings before the 11:00 Mass or my recent visit to F.E. Warren

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<sup>7</sup> GDC, n. 226; CT, 68; CCC, 2226

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, Discourse at the General Audience, 4.II.15.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 179.

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Air Base where the chaplains' offices were just moved to create classroom space around the chapel. The Eucharist nourishes our faith.<sup>10</sup>

Collaboration is essential. Families, worshiping Catholic community, catechists all create a team to offer formation for the youth and children. Like the school of Nazareth mentioned by Blessed Paul VI on his visit there, we all learn to live our faith fully and share it in the midst of the community. In this light, parents should be made aware of and asked to participate in teaching the fourteen standards and the respective indicators, thereby enriching their own faith through the process of catechizing their children.

There is no substitute for the family. It is true that we have many examples of saints who were forced to struggle against parental constraints in order to respond to a specific vocation and others who came to the faith later in life or despite the family. However, the vast majority of us grow in the faith thanks to the example in the home.

The Holy Father made many important points in his Message for Lent this year. It is important for all of us to be renewed during this annual retreat of the entire Church. To quote His Holiness: "During this Lent, then, brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord: *"Fac cor nostrum secundum cor tuum"*: *Make our hearts like yours* (Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). In this way we will receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalization of indifference."<sup>11</sup>

To contribute to our process of encountering Jesus, through the kindness of a generous donor, I intend to make available to military installations two gifts. One is Msgr. Peter Vaghi's book *Encountering Jesus* and the other is the DVD Priest, Prophet, and King produced by Father Robert Barron.

Allow me to reiterate the expression of my gratitude to all of you who are involved in religious education on military installations. My deepest gratitude also to Pflaum Publishers and Mr. Mike Raffio for their offering this dinner to all of us. The opportunity for us to gather, which they have made possible, is precious.

To return to the baptism ritual, the concluding blessing reads in part "With their wives [the fathers] will be the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. May they be also the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith by what they say and do."

We are all here to help them do just that!

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. CCC, 2226.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, Message for Lent, 2015.