



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

Sharing Our Faith with Our Children – Some Possibilities

Rituals are comforting for people of all ages, and in particular for people with developmental disabilities. The most productive rituals are those in which everyone can participate in their own way. Do you practice rituals of the Catholic faith in your home? (I ask this also knowing that there are some days, that at the end of the day, you look back and wonder how everyone survived!)

Some people wonder about how to explain God to a child who thinks only in concrete terms. However, all children are concrete thinkers. Maybe your son or daughter will always be so, but still share your sense of wonder and awe at God's activity in your life, in good and bad times. Develop a picture library of associations you have about God, such as parts of creation, expressions of love, comfort and support.

Although coming together as a community for Eucharist is at the center of who we are as Catholics, incorporating some of the rituals of our faith into our home helps to join the details of our daily life with our faith and our Eucharistic celebrations on Sunday. It also helps our children grow up with a sense of God in our lives, and an experience of faith to draw from.

Some possibilities to consider are below. Pick one as a place to start and add after it has been successful or mastered.

When you eat together at the table –

- Encourage everyone to take part in the process of preparation, no matter how small.
- Include everyone in the conversation, even if by reference.
- Relax and enjoy the time together (remember, these are *goals!*)

Make time to pray together as a family and modeling prayer for your child. Prayer can be spontaneous, simple conversation with our God. However, if your son or daughter has expressive language challenges, focus on prayers that are used in Mass and/or that involve the body, such as the Our Father and making the sign of the cross. These can be prayed at home and in the Mass.

- in the morning
- in the evening
- before meals
- as part of the bed-time ritual
- for strength and guidance in hard times
- to give thanks in good times
- just to praise God

Acknowledge special seasons and days of the Church calendar year such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, feast day of a favorite saint with family rituals.

Have sign(s) of our Catholic faith in your home, for example a crucifix or cross, a Bible or rosary beads.

Find books with stories of our faith that have good pictures for your child. Even if there are too many words, you can adapt the text as you read it. Think of how these stories have been important in your life and share that with your child.

Listen to religious songs with your child – at home or in the car.

Play a matching game with pictures of people and places from your parish such as the front image of the church, your priest, your catechist.

Visit your church with your child when no one is around. Take photographs of features of the church and create a “Church Tour” booklet for your child.

Review the parts of the Mass with your child before attending. Set expectations of length of the Mass, music, crowds, seating preference. Don't be discouraged if it takes more than one try to make it through.