Guess who’s watching you now!

In this Year of Faith, it is worth remembering that our faith and our core values are passed on primarily in the home. TV advertisements for responsible drinking often end up with the reminder ‘Your children are watching you’. And if a child’s behaviour at school is particularly difficult, who does the school call in to enlist help? The parents, of course! Most parents are not trained teachers but, for better or for worse, they are the prime nurturers in faith of their children.

“Worry not that your children don’t listen to you. Worry that they watch you.”

So is it time for some ‘In-service training’?

A major way in which we nurture our children’s faith is by letting them see how ours is lived out in daily life. So it’s always good to reflect on where we can brush up our own faith life and make it more relevant and attractive to our children.

This leaflet presents a collection of ideas that different families found worked for them.

© Australian Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life (BCPL), July 2013.
Text and design: Australian Catholic Marriage & Family Council
For further resources:
Previous Parish Kits of BCPL: www.acmfc.org.au
‘Walking Together in Faith’: www.teresapirola.net/wtf3
Family Rituals

Family rituals are repetitive family activities that distinguish our particular family and often reflect some of our deepest desires. For example:

Blessing
We deeply desire that God will bless our children and look after them. As we help them snuggle into bed at night we can kiss them or make a sign of the cross on their forehead and say something like, “May God bless you and keep you safe always.”

Give thanks
“In one family I know, the father often can’t get home until after dinner but then the family gets together and each person shares one thing that happened that day for which they can thank God.”

Family prayer list
There is always someone we know in special need of prayers. The ritual of lighting a candle for them each evening acts as a simple reminder to pray for them and helps involve others.

Make Sunday special
Go to Mass as a family, preferably a Mass attended by other families. Explain what is happening to little children. Afterwards enjoy a simple treat or outing together and discuss the readings or homily with older children. Avoid cramming the day with activities.

“My husband is not a Catholic, and it is difficult to get the kids up to Mass each Sunday. Being involved in running the Children’s Liturgy has helped. To my surprise, my own children have taken an interest and help out. Also, it gives me extra motivation to be there”.

Celebrate Feast Days
The saints are our heroes in faith. Identify a saint for each family member – preferably their Christian name or their Confirmation name. Discuss how that saint’s particular virtues can be lived today. Retell the story of their saint’s life (see www.catholic.org/saints). Mark the feast day in the calendar.

Grandparents
Many grandparents provide the gift of time, so valuable in the frenetic pace of today. Also, they are the ‘central bank of memories’ for the family and can give special insights into faith practice. Just their physical presence, especially at Mass, gives a strong sense of continuity.

Choose Your Friends
It makes sense to cultivate good friends with common values. They become significant other adults in the lives of our children. As relatable role models, they give credibility from a different perspective to all that we try to teach. Think about arranging to go to the same Mass together and maybe going to the beach or a BBQ afterwards. In this way, other families can become like extended family and bring healthy fun into our lives.

Good Behaviour Patterns
All of us need to rethink our patterns of behaviour as we go through life. If you wrote your own list of Good Habits of Effective Catholic Parents, what would it be? Examples might include:

1. Talk naturally about God. Sprinkle the conversation with comments such as “Thank you Lord” (when something good happens) or “Praise God!” (on seeing a beautiful sunset), “God willing” (as we talk of our plans), “God bless you” (when saying goodbye).

2. Show practical concern for others. The Church’s Option for the Poor begins with us. Be quick to respond to someone in need and, if possible, engage the rest of the family in the response.

3. Praise the Church!
“Often after Mass we would criticise the singing, the homily, or an annoying parishioner. Then our kids started to complain about going to Mass: ‘All you do is complain about it. So why should we go?’ It made us realise that our negativity undermined our children’s faith and did not reflect our deep love for the Church.”

4. Encourage questioning. Questions about faith are opportunities to enter into their world of discovery and help us to discover more about our own faith. When you are not sure of the answer, show your willingness to learn more about it yourself.

5. Pray. Pray often. Pray with confidence. Our prayers are always answered, though not always in the way we immediately expect.