INSTITUTE FOR EVANGELIZATION
Office of Family, Youth & Young Adult Ministry
ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

Family Faith Formation
Implementation Series
Worksheet #1: Pray & Listen



Stage 1 – Pray & Listen

Engage a team of people in intentional intercessory prayer and purposeful sacred listening over a sustained period of time, in order to discern God's desires for this program, process, or initiative. Spend significant time and energy listening to God and to parents in your community. Stage 1 is the absolutely essential foundation of the process, and continues as a vital element woven throughout the entire cycle.

STAGE 1.1: ENGAGE A TEAM OF PEOPLE IN INTERCESSORY PRAYER, SPENDING SIGNIFICANT TIME & ENERGY LISTENING TO GOD.

Pray: Ask the Lord whom to invite in as intercessors for the parents and families of your parish/pastorate. Pray as well for guidance on the "ask" – what expectations, precisely, will you be asking of these intercessors when you invite them into this form of service. Consider gathered and non-gathered ways of engaging the intercessors in prayer with one another.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38)

Invite: Share with your potential intercessors that the Lord has inspired you to ask them to give of their time and energy in this way. Share with them why this work is so important. Give them space to pray about it. Let them know how (and by when) to indicate they are "in" (perhaps as simple as an email or brief conversation).

Your Kingdom come, your will be done…not my will, but Yours.

Intercede: Along with your intercessory team, ask the Lord to guide you when formulating your intercessions, and to give you clarity on what He wants to accomplish. Notice what the Holy Spirit draws forth in your hearts. Continue to pray together as the rest of the implementation process unfolds, fine-tuning your petitions as you learn more and encounter more of the disciples and not-yet-disciples impacted by this process.

STAGE 1.2: ENGAGE A TEAM IN PURPOSEFUL SACRED LISTENING, SPENDING SIGNIFICANT TIME & ENERGY LISTENING TO PARENTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

Reflect: Where are families (in particular, parents) with school-age children missing in your parish?

Ask the Lord to help you to GET CURIOUS about why they are not present.

Identify Listeners: Whom can you ask to help you explore why parents and families are not present? *(They must have good pastoral sense and be well-formed in the process of sacred listening.)*

Identify Target "Listen-ees": Whom should you be seeking out intentionally for listening? Remember: Good planning is "planning with," not "planning for." Consider the cultural makeup of your parish/pastorate, and be sure to include all key stakeholders. In the case of Family Faith Formation, you *must* include invested, marginal, and disinvested parents.

Design a Listening Process: How will you listen? Given the stakeholders you have identified, you must tailor a listening process that will effectively engage those stakeholders.

- While listening should include informal opportunities to gain insights, it is important to intentionally create space over a defined time period to listen with full attention.
- Listening should be done one-on-one, one-on-two (with couples), or in very small groups.
- Scheduling and format should be flexible, in favor of the needs of the "listen-ees." Be prepared with a variety of options and add more times/formats as needed.
- Be sure to plan for a way to capture insights in a non-threatening manner, perhaps by jotting down notes unobtrusively during the conversation, or immediately after. Inform "listen-ees" of the purpose of your notetaking. Digital means (such as typing or recording) often feel more invasive than old-fashioned paper-and-pencil, so it is best to avoid them while in the presence of the "listen-ees." *(Note: It is never acceptable to record someone without their knowledge.)*
- Surveys can be useful tools but are no substitute for personal deep listening.
- The goal should be to "glean without grilling" – invite these parents into a space where they can share the realities of their day-to-day lives without fear of being shamed, exposed as "not knowing enough," or asked to volunteer for "one more thing."
- You are trying to discover something precious: What moves these parents' hearts? What might compel them to more fully embrace their role as protagonists, active agents in their formation and that of their children?

Questions You Might Ask:

- Could you share with me what a day in the life of your family looks like?
- What do you love about your children?
- What is the biggest obstacle facing your family right now?
- What are your greatest hopes for your children? Your greatest fears?
- If you could ask God one question, what would you ask?

Invite and Listen: Invite your identified "listen-ees" to share their experiences and insights in a conversation with a listener. Be sure to collect the insights gleaned.

UP NEXT: *Move to Stage 2: Explore & Imagine*

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Stage 2 – Explore & Imagine

Invite the Holy Spirit as you investigate existing methods and resources, ponder possible creative adaptations, and envision innovative new approaches. In this case, resources includes not just catechetical materials, but also staff/volunteer ministers (actual and potential), facilities, finances, etc. Share updates with your prayer team & continue to listen widely.

STAGE 2.1: TAKE A SNAPSHOT OF YOUR CURRENT "ECOSYSTEM."

List: What does your parish/pastorate currently do in each of the Dimensions of Formation *(Formal Catechesis, Community Building, Prayer & Liturgy, and Meaningful Service)*?

At this stage, *do NOT limit your list to programs designed just for children and/or families.* You should aim to create a comprehensive list across the entire parish/pastorate and community. Include any and all annual events, community partners, and outside outreach/service organizations in your area.

Focus: Review the list and note any efforts that *currently* include children/families or clearly *have potential* to include them in the future. These will be your "key focus areas" for the initial Explore & Imagine process.

Describe: Write down a comprehensive description of each of those key programs, events, partnerships, and opportunities – including the Who, What, Where, When, and How for each effort (the Why will be more defined later, but must be closely related to the Mission of Jesus and his Church!).

Go into as much detail as possible – specific dates, times, individuals involved, rooms/facilities used, scope and sequence/catechetical resources (if applicable), physical materials, even budgetary income/expenses. Imagine you are describing these key focus areas to an outsider who has never experienced this program, event, partnership, or opportunity.

Therefore, I, too, hearing of your faith in the Lord Jesus and of your love for all the holy ones, do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. (Ephesians 1:15-17)

Pray: Invite your intercessors to pray with you through this process. At this point, a great suggestion would be to pray in gratitude for all that has come before (especially over the individuals named in the "describe" step above), and for wisdom to discern a primary focus within the key focus areas.

STAGE 2.2: INVESTIGATE EXISTING METHODS/RESOURCES, PONDER POSSIBLE CREATIVE ADAPTATIONS, AND ENVISION INNOVATIVE NEW APPROACHES.

Some Rules of Thumb for Assessing Methods and Resources:

1. **Think Process, Not Program:** It is natural to get excited about a well-crafted curriculum or an innovative out-of-the-box resource – but before we commit, we have discern what kind of process will move our target audience along a unique catechumenal pathway of discipleship, in a sustainable and fruitful way. Does this method/resource employ/enable a catechumenal, lifelong-process philosophy, or is it more one-size-fits-all?
2. **Think Quality, Not Quantity:** Family Faith Formation almost always means fewer overall "class sessions," but more intentional and sustained efforts to ensure that what we invite families into is *always* well-worth their time. Does this method/resource rely on the sheer volume of "sessions" or content to accomplish its goals, or is what it offers a thoughtfully curated and prioritized approach to both content and relationship-building?
3. **Move from Teachers to Witnesses:** The *Directory for Catechesis (DFC)* reiterates the fact that "modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 41). Does this method/resource call forth and require authentic witness from those implementing the efforts (e.g., catechists, small group leaders, facilitators, etc.)?
4. **Move from Rows to Circles:** The DFC invites a more conversational, communal methods of learning as opposed to "sage on a stage" style catechesis. Does this method/resource reinforce a sense that we are all disciples (or not-yet-disciples) on a journey together?
5. **Unleash Protagonism:** Will this help us to draw forth protagonists in faith by unleashing the protaganism of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all, young and old? The DFC affirms that each and every person, of all ages and abilities, is meant to be the active agent in his or her own formation, and that the protagonism of parents has a particularly profound impact on their child(ren). Does this method/resource assume that parents (and all participants) are uniquely called by God? Does it affirm each person as radically free to encounter Him and respond to that encounter in unexpected ways?
6. **Remember What You Have Seen & Heard:** If something from your prayer and listening process stood out as particularly important, keep that at the forefront of your mind as you explore and imagine. Everything should flow from and to the mission: make disciples!

Test everything; retain what is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Some Suggestions for Where to Discover & Ponder New Possibilities:

- **Ask Your Neighbors:** Get together with others in your region to discuss initiatives they have seen bear fruit, and wisdom they have gleaned so far. Maybe even visit and participate!
- **Check In With Your Own Leadership:** Remember protagonism? God may draw forth innovative ideas forth from those right in your own midst!
- Visit **websites, participate in social media forums, and attend conferences**.
- **Read** books, blogs, research studies, curriculum samples, and relevant Church documents.
- Look to the **rich history of the Church** and the development of her movements and ministries.
- **Pay attention to non-Catholic sources:** You may find the seed of a good idea by noticing initiatives in local schools, libraries, gyms, sports teams, clubs, other faith communities, etc.
- **Ask the Lord for the gift of WONDERING.** Be open to the question *"what if…?"*

UP NEXT: *Move to Stage 3: Discern & Plan*

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Worksheet #3: Discern & Plan



Stage 3 – Discern & Plan

Redouble prayer efforts and more deeply engage the whole team in assessing Stage 2's possibilities in light of Stage 1's insights. As the objectives become clear and the plan takes shape, continue to immerse the planning process in prayer and listening.

STAGE 3.1: REDOUBLE PRAYER EFFORTS, DISCERN, & DECIDE.

Share and Pray: Your intercessory team, your listening team, and your core leaders should now share with one another a full accounting the insights from Stage 1's prayer and listening, as well as the possibilities uncovered in Stage 2. Take time to pray together in gratitude for what has been revealed through the process so far, and for clarity in the discernment process, and for prudence in the planning to come.

Entrust your works to the LORD, and your plans will succeed. (Proverbs 16:3)

Discern: Once all information has been shared, everyone should be given time and structure to intentionally discern where they believe the Lord is calling your parish/pastorate. The process may be gathered or non-gathered, brief or over a period of time, formal or informal, but it must be steeped in prayer and a spirit of humble service. "Lobbying" for one's favorite option should be avoided, and it is wise to remember that discernment is not about "majority rule." This, too, is a time of sacred listening, to one another and to the Lord.

Be sure to identify a clear end point for this specific time of discernment. If desired, Institute for Evangelization staff can help identify specific discernment methods/tools that fit your needs.

Decide: Pastor/pastoral life director and key leaders should gather and finalize a decision. Once that decision is clear, planning may begin in earnest!

STAGE 3.2: PLAN FOR SUCCESS.

Pray: Invite your intercessors to pray with you through the planning process as it unfolds.

Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? (Luke 14:28)

BE SURE TO CONSIDER ALL OF THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS THROUGHOUT YOUR PLANNING:

Safeguard: Consider the implications of your plan on safety. If you are making significant structural changes to programs or are unsure of how the policies/procedures apply, consult the Office of Child & Youth Protection and/or Risk Management accordingly.

Measure: How will you know if your initiative is fruitful? How do we track the movement of x number of families along the pathway toward missionary discipleship?

- Consider implementing intentional, objective measures of assessment for how participants of all ages are progressing (or not) along your parish's discipleship pathway. Note that these metrics may not be readily available nor do most catechetical resources provide ready tools for gathering this information, so consultation with the Institute for Evangelization is advised.

Marshall & Adapt Resources: How might your finances, facilities, physical and digital resources, and human resources be put to use and/or better utilized? For example:

- existing curricular resources *(no matter how excellent!)* will likely need to be adapted in some way *(time, approach, activities, etc.)*
- volunteers (and even staff!) may find a better fit serving in different roles
- creative, frugal baseline spending could account for the new approach's new expenses
- new or current donors may be excited about the prospects of revived formation opportunities
- rooms currently in disuse could be retrofitted as meeting spaces
- capacity limits can be expanded by repeating the same offerings more than once, on a different day and/or time *(this has the added benefit of more flexibility for families)*

In spite of the adaptations listed above, there will likely be resource(s) that currently fall short of what is needed. Who do you need to engage in order to work toward filling the gaps? If those gaps will take significant time to fill, might you be able to pilot a less resource-intensive trial in the meantime, to test your hypotheses and gain time for raising funds and interest?

Build Your Calendar: Build your calendar around what will work for the families and parents in your community, rather than around a resource. Given what you learned in Stage 1:

- How far in advance do you believe families need to have information?
- How often is it reasonable to expect to meet?
- How complex is the family schedule? *(in other words, how simple must the "ask" be in order to not introduce an undue burden when navigating the church's expectations)*

Communicate: It is important to provide key information about your expectations of families (the Who, What, Where, When, How, and Why) in clear, readily-accessible fashion.

- Creative preaching on the topic is often fruitful! This is a great place to share the Why!
- Plan to share information *early*: *well before* the moment families actually need it.
- Plan to communicate *often*: Stagger and repeat communications through different means. Start with less frequent communications and increase frequency as events draw near.
- Think through *all* potential modes of communication, and focus on those your "listen-ees" in Stage 1 identified as being most useful for them *(e.g., text reminders vs. a bulletin blurb).*
- Communicate about communication. Tell families how/when they will receive/find info.
- Make sure all available channels of information are accurate & regularly updated.[1]

UP NEXT: *Move to Stage 4: Execute & Document*

[1] Parish/pastorate websites frequently suffer from bloat – items are posted but never removed. Remove or revamp overly-detailed pages which are difficult to maintain, and streamline all pages to direct website visitors to the place(s) where accurate information can be most reliably obtained (even if it's simply a contact email address).

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Stage 4 – Execute & Document

Implement the plan. With the Lord's help, make a point to notice and record areas of fruitfulness and areas to adjust in order to better meet the objectives. Invite and record feedback from key stakeholders.

STAGE 4.1: IMPLEMENT THE PLAN – ASSEMBLE & FORM YOUR TEAM

Pray: Invite your intercessory team to cover the process of forming the team in prayer, both for the individuals involved and for the flourishing of the team as a whole.

Assemble and do initial formation with the team who will be implementing the initiative:

- Realign current staff and volunteers to the new approach.
- Recruit the right new additions to the team.
- Spend time getting to know one another on a person level, and praying together.
- Prepare the team with clear instructions and practical tools for their work.
- Ensure the groundwork is laid for ongoing spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral formation for each individual and as a group.
- If time is not incorporated into the current schedule/calendar for this critical work with the team, reassess the use of time and consider what will need to "give way" in order make time and space for ongoing team formation and support.

STAGE 4.2: IMPLEMENT THE PLAN – PRE-LAUNCH COMMUNICATIONS

Pray: Your intercessory team should begin praying hard for your implementation team, by name.

Get People Excited: Initiate your main communications plan and adapt as needed. If one person expresses confusion, you need to simplify your communications and *try again.*

STAGE 4.3: IMPLEMENT THE PLAN – LAUNCH!

Pray: Just before launch, your intercessory team should be praying for a great "first impression" that lays the groundwork for continued fruitfulness.

Launch: Kick off the initiative! Be sure to check in with your team in prayer immediately before launch, and check in immediately after for fresh, honest feedback and self-assessment.

Pray: Invite your intercessors to pray for participants as well as for the team, especially if they can do so by name, throughout the duration of this iteration of the initiative.

My God will fully supply whatever you need,
in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:19)

STAGE 4.4: LISTEN & DOCUMENT.

Document your own insights: With the Lord's help, make a point to notice and record areas of fruitfulness and areas to adjust in order to better meet the objectives.

- In short, take good notes. Whenever something strikes you as particularly effective or in need of a change, write it down!

Pray: Ask your intercessors to pray so that God may give us eyes to see and ears to hear and how His will is being made manifest by what is happening. Where does God want to prune or to grow this initiative? They should also pray for holy boldness and wisdom for those giving feedback, and should ask for humility, patience, and hope for those receiving feedback.

Document others' insights: Invite and record feedback from all key stakeholders (including your intercessory, listening, and implementation teams).

- Build your evaluation processes based on your previously-devleoped metrics.
- Have clear means of collecting insights and feedback *throughout the initiative* (not just at the end!), perhaps engaging your "listeners" in some of that work once again.

Matthew 25:14-21:

"It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one—to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.'

His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.'"

UP NEXT: *Move to Stage 5: Evaluate & Iterate*

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Worksheet #5: Evaluate & Iterate



Stage 5 – Evaluate & Iterate

With key stakeholders, assess the initiative's fruitfulness. Repeat the cycle, first by bringing fresh insights from Stage 4 into the Lord's ongoing conversation with your intercessory prayer team, and then listening in a more targeted way for others' insights into the challenges that persist.

STAGE 5.1: CELEBRATION & PRAYER OF GRATITUDE

Stop and Celebrate: It wasn't perfect, but you took a risk and weathered the challenges for the sake of the Lord and his heart for people!

Pray in Gratitude: Intercessors and the entire team should lift up praise to God for all that has been transformed, and in hope for all the transformation still to come.

Share the "Wins": If this hasn't happened throughout the process, be sure to share the beautiful things God has done through this effort. Big or small, something has changed for the better – that's just how our God works!

Share the Challenges and "Growing Edges": What didn't work? What did we learn? What would or should we do differently next time? Should there be a "next time," or should we re-envision more radically?

Rest: Part of honoring the Lord is honoring the Commandment of Sabbath. It's possible you've been "burning the candle at both ends." You have been stealing peace from yourself - the time has come, God says, for him to return that peace to your heart. *REST.*

Pray: The Intercessory team should pray about one thing: that the Lord provides rest and refreshment to everyone involved in this process.

God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.
Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.
Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed.
On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing;
he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken.
God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation.
(Genesis 1:31-2:3)

STAGE 5.2: EVALUATE FOR THE FUTURE.

After a period of rest, return to the insights gathered in Stage 4, with particular attention to the feedback gathered from key stakeholders.

Pray: Your intercessory team should be praying for God to make next steps clear, and to make a way for necessary changes for the future and reinforcement of all the good that has come before.

Share the "Wins" (Again): Remember the good, and praise God again. Provide any updates or developments related to those wins, or even news wins that have emerged.

Share the Challenges and "Growing Edges" (Again): What didn't work? What did we learn? What would or should we do differently next time? Should there be a next time, or should we re-envision more radically?

The one who sat on the throne said,

"Behold, I make all things new."

(Revelation 21:5)

STAGE 5.3: PREPARE TO ITERATE

Pray: The intercessory team should continue to pray for the Lord to reveal next steps, and for all who will be impacted by the next iteration.

Prepare: The implementation and listening teams should be engaging in formation that responds to needs identified in Stage 4 & Stage 5.1 to 5.2.

Listen Closely: Create targeted opportunities for formal and informal sacred listening around the particular challenges and "growing edges" that arose through the documentation, evaluation, and feedback process.

Go: Return to Stage 1, armed with all the insights from the first iteration. Repeat the implementation cycle until told otherwise – the journey isn't done until we reach eternity!

UP NEXT: *Return to Stage 1: Pray & Listen*