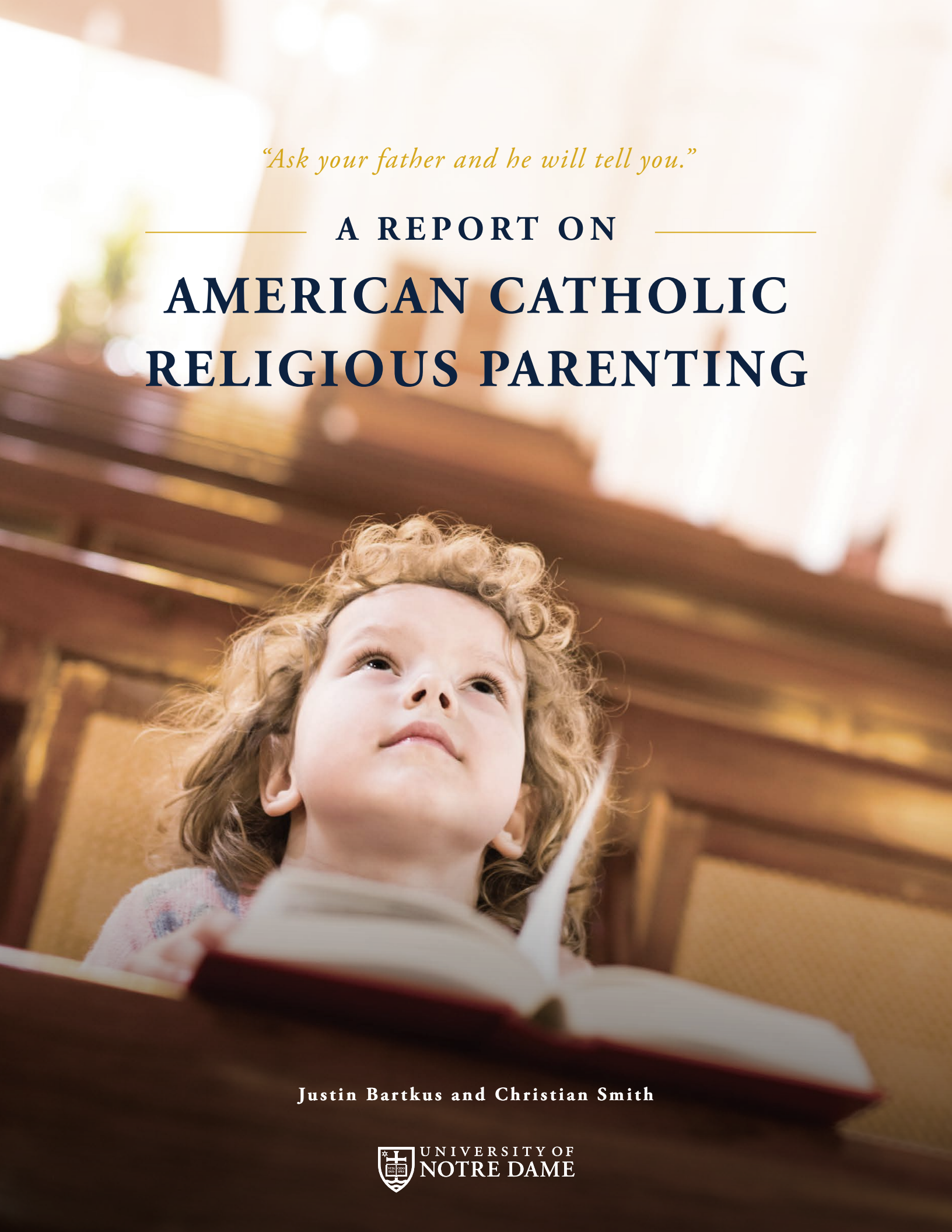
"Ask your father and he will tell you."

A REPORT ON

AMERICAN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS PARENTING



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UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

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Most committed Catholics have become aware of the drift of American Catholic youth from the Church and from the practice of their faith as they pass into adulthood.

The vast majority of children of the millennial generation fall well short of what the Church would consider the most basic requirements for active membership. Dour observations about the rise of the "nones" among millennials—those individuals who identify with no religious tradition at all—have become commonplace. In such conditions, do Catholic parents who wish to pass on their faith have to steel themselves against a high probability of failure? Is theirs but a blind hope, a "Hail Mary," as it were? How exactly is the Catholic household positioned relative to mainstream American culture, and consequently, what is the "job description" of the contemporary Catholic parent? What can parents do to optimize their chances of replicating their faith in their children, and how can clergy and pastoral professionals assist them? This report is concerned to provide some answers to these questions.

INTRO-
DUCTION

The Basic Claim

Of all actors, it is parents who exert overwhelmingly the greatest influence upon the eventual religious views and commitments of American children.

A bevy of powerful cultural scripts have suggested the contrary of this central claim about the transmission of Catholic belief between generations. First, there is the popular cliché that, as children progress through adolescence and into adulthood, parental influence recedes further and further into the background, ultimately declining to nil as children embrace other influences of their own choosing. On this account, maturing teenagers and young adults become utterly self-determining agents immune to ancestral influence.

Second, the thick and multifaceted institutional structure of the Church has often provided Catholic parents the opportunity to "outsource" the religious formation of their children to Catholic schools, CCD programs, sacramental preparation classes, and the like. Though parents may have to supplement such institutional formation by maintaining regular religious practices, such as saying grace before meals or making sure the family gets to Mass on Sundays, the major responsibility for teaching and formation nevertheless rests primarily with clergy and institutions, into which parents merely "plug in." That renders the entire family passive recipients of sacraments and religious instruction rather than integral actors in the

perpetuation of the Catholic faith. In confirmation of this impulse, Catholic formation of youth has frequently been construed as mere preparation for the sacraments, understood as institutionally standardized rites of passage. Because parents occupy no necessary role in the administration of the sacraments, the institutional Church, with its official rituals and catechetical expertise, has been perceived to bear central responsibility for the formation of children. This and other cultural scripts suggest that Catholic parents have been permitted to believe that it is someone else who is primarily responsible for forming their children religiously, while they themselves play a secondary role.

As we will explain in this report, such cultural scripts hinder the possibility of effective intergenerational religious transmission from parents to children today. The crucial location where youth's religious outcomes are largely decided is not the congregation or the parish, but the home. The primary mechanisms by which Catholic identity becomes rooted in children's lives are not Catholic schooling or sacramental preparation, but rather the day-to-day religious practices of the family and the ways parents model their faith and share it in conversation, collaboration, and exposure to outside religious opportunities. This is all to say that the definitive causal agents in the religious and spiritual outcomes of American youth are neither clergy nor youth ministers, neither educators nor the voices of popular culture and media, but parents. That is the basic story that this report will tell. We believe that the full implications of this truth, for all its obviousness, have not yet been adequately understood by parents and formators in religious communities.

“The crucial location where youth's religious outcomes are largely decided is not the congregation or the parish, but the home.

We should concede that the flawed cultural scripts mentioned above are not altogether incorrect. Parents who succeed in the transmission of Catholic faith undeniably require the assistance of parish congregations and institutional programming, and emerging adolescents certainly do respond to their religious formation with an increasing degree of autonomy and reflection. Catechetical instruction and sacramental initiation

will always remain central to the formation of young Catholics. Yet parental religious influence is the condition of possibility for other influences to take effect. What's more, parental influence does not disappear as children mature.

Thus parents represent not simply *an* influence on the development of children's religious worldviews, but the *arch*-influence over it. Their efforts at religious formation are capable of overcoming the many cultural currents which flow in the direction of the secular. However, children and parents alike are frequently unaware of the robust, long-term ways in which the latter affect the former. By sharing the results of our study, we aim to bring the profundity of this parental influence to the attention of not only parents, but all those who are committed to handing on the Catholic faith to the next generation.



The Birth of the Present Study and Summary of the Report

Our study of intergenerational transmission of religious belief grew out of prior research focusing on the spirituality of American teenagers and the evolution of their spiritual and religious attitudes as they transitioned into adulthood, the National Study of Youth and Religion. This was a longitudinal study with three waves of data collection, including interviews with individual young people (as teenagers, college-aged emerging adults, and young adults) and surveys of parents. We found that those teenagers who remained highly religiously committed from their teenage years into adulthood were overwhelmingly likely to have had parents who attended weekly religious services, who reported that religion was "extremely important" to them, and who talked about religion in the home on a regular basis. When considering why emerging adults demonstrated high levels of religious commitment, no causal factor proved even remotely as powerful as parents, whose own religious commitment effectively set a ceiling above which children rarely rose. That is, we found that parents generally define for children the role that religious faith and practice ought to play in life, attitudes which most children roughly adopt.

The current research project was thus conceived in order to shift the spotlight of inquiry from teenagers and young adults onto parental attitudes towards religious transmission. From 2014 to 2016, we interviewed 245 parents in 145 households, including an oversample of 73 Catholic parents of varying ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, religious commitment levels, and family types (single parent, two parent, etc.). Our researchers conducted interviews in homes and coffee shops, church buildings and local libraries—wherever parents were willing to meet with us and provide us with a snapshot of their families' lives. These parents shared stories of their own religious upbringing and beliefs, expressed their hopes and aspirations for their children, and explained how religion was intertwined with the life of their home.

Our goal was to listen closely to the culture and convictions parents revealed and to see what patterns

would emerge that could explain why a minority of children committed themselves to the religious identity received from their parents while many others drifted from it. We talked with parents whose children had strayed from Catholicism only to return in adulthood; whose sons aspired to the priesthood or whose daughters led social justice groups at Catholic colleges; and many who either vaguely sensed or directly witnessed a steadily declining commitment of their children to their native Catholicism. We asked ourselves why certain parental stories, practices, and ways of talking seemed to correspond with successful religious transmission while others tended to correspond with merely partial or generally unsuccessful transmission.

In this report, we will provide our most prescient observations about household religious culture and how it affects parents' chances of successfully passing on their religious belief. In this way, we hope to accomplish four objectives: 1) to properly define the American home and the task of religious transmission in terms of the concept of "culture;" 2) to allow parents and Catholic ministerial professionals to examine snapshots of concrete success in parental transmission; 3) to provide a coherent framework for describing the cultural dynamics of transmission in these successful households, and in any religious household; and 4) to stimulate practical deliberation about what sort of pastoral action to take on the basis of our research findings. Our first objective will be covered in Part One of this report, our second and third objectives in Part Two, and our fourth objective in Part Three.

THE FOUR OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT

1. To properly define the American home and the task of religious transmission in terms of the concept of "culture".
2. To allow parents and Catholic ministerial professionals to examine snapshots of concrete success in parental transmission.
3. To provide a coherent framework for describing the cultural dynamics of transmission in these successful households, and in any religious household.
4. To stimulate practical deliberation about what sort of pastoral action to take on the basis of our research findings.



When I baptized my children I said, "I will raise them in the Catholic faith." I feel an obligation to that. And responsibility.

PART ONE

The American Catholic Household as Cultural Project

The American household is a cultural project, built and developed by parents both consciously and unconsciously. It imparts to children an overall sense of identity and basic aspirations, orienting children to other cultural influences that they encounter outside the home, including religion.

We believe that any parent who wishes to pass on their Catholic faith must understand their home as a miniature *culture*, a project which initiates children into certain core values, practices, and modes of experience, all of whose validity is constantly tested by what parents do and say in interpretive reinforcement of those core convictions. In the home, children receive wisdom about what matters in life, what commitments demand investment of time, energy and emotion, and generally what a viable adult existence should look like. This idea of parenting as the building of a *culture* is often underappreciated; more prominent is the notion of parenting as a series of decisions regarding which experiences and investments will maximize children's future well-being. Yet whether parents realize it or not, children are generally inclined to follow the grain of parents' own attitudes and commitments, especially when it comes to religion. That is, in addition to providing for their well-being, parents inevitably teach their children *how to live*.



Of course, the culture of a household is influenced by other factors. Parents draw upon schools, extended family, mass media, and—especially significant for us—religious institutions and congregations in order to form their children. Parents are nevertheless the dominant influence on children, not only because they occupy a preeminent position with regard to communication and intimacy in young people's lives, but also because they make administrative choices about how the family spends its time, what priorities are most esteemed in the household, and what sorts of opportunities children will encounter through which they will develop their values, identity, and a sense of responsibility.

This means that parents are an *ordering* influence. They do not simply yield their children to the effects of other influences (such as teachers, peers, or coaches), but *shape* how children interpret such influences. Gradually, over the course of their children's development, parents assist in bringing together the disjointed fragments of children's experience of the world into a coherent and meaningful whole, making sense of their lives and providing a template for how to move about in the adult world.

In the current American context, the transmission of Catholicism to the next generation must be understood as a cultural project of the household. It can only succeed if children enter adulthood with the conscious perception that being a practicing Catholic is a long-term, worthwhile, and primary life commitment.

The transmission of Catholicism to children is a fundamental *choice* that parents make for their household, a commitment which, to succeed, must be reinforced as a value of greatest priority. We define "successful" or "effective" transmission as occurring when children enter adulthood with the perception that being a practicing Catholic is so worthwhile or necessary that it demands a long-term, primary self-commitment. In cases of families whose children were not yet adults, we considered "success" to mean that children exhibited not only a general non-resistance to religion, but in fact demonstrated an overall eagerness, enjoyment and engagement with it in their current stage of development.

Unfortunately, the parental aspiration to create a household sympathetic to religious commitment runs against the grain of prevailing cultural attitudes towards religion. These attitudes often are not overtly hostile, but still in no way bolster parents' efforts to demonstrate the worthiness and attractiveness of religious commitment. The building of a religious home in the American social milieu is less an exercise in counterculture than one in alternative culture. To provide an analogy, just as the average American has barely more than superficial experience of vegetarianism and is dissuaded by default cultural mores (i.e., our national love of meat-eating) from entering more deeply into the experience of vegetarianism, so too does the average American child experience very little of religious practices and worldviews. Because our culture is drifting away from religion, the average child is unlikely to experience a deeper encounter with a religious account of reality. This explains both why the religious texture of the home is of cardinal significance in determining whether children remain Catholic, and why parents have become so isolated and exposed as the primary representatives of the Catholic Church to children. The surrounding culture, of which religious clergy, congregations and institutions together constitute but a small fraction, mostly corrodes the religiousness of young people who are not formed in vibrant Catholic households. Generally speaking, no religious influence besides mom and dad is positioned to demonstrate convincingly to children the desirability of practicing the Catholic faith.

In our particular social circumstances, then, parents play three primary roles in transmitting religion:

1 "SPONSOR" OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH:

Parents are the point of access between the Church and their children. To differing degrees, neighborhoods, ethnicities and mainstream cultural attitudes toward religion have all declined as cultural "carriers" of Catholic belief. If children are not initially exposed to the Catholic faith by their parents, they usually will not be exposed to it at all.

2 "GATEKEEPER" OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH:

Parents have nearly total control over how much and what sorts of religious content their children encounter—whether children attend Catholic school; whether prayer, reading the Bible, or receiving Communion and going to Reconciliation will occur regularly in their lives; whether they will be exposed to relationships and communities that have a religious dimension, and so forth. Parents are thus the "gatekeeper" of religious content for their children. To use another metaphor, parents are like a faucet, determining whether religious content will arrive in children's lives at an occasional drip or in a regular flow.

3 "INTERPRETER" OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH:

Parents do not act as a neutral medium, a mere channel, between Catholicism and their children. Rather, they are definitive role models, *mentors*, who embody a specific manner of being Catholic. They teach children how to apprehend the world, how to understand what is good and what is evil, how one ought to affectively, intellectually and practically engage with the world, and so on. They do not just "represent" the faith; in many cases, they are the only meaningful embodiment of that faith in the lives of children. Parents render faith a matter of flesh and blood rather than a lifeless mish-mash of doctrines and teachings. If children do not "see" Catholicism in the "face" of their parents, they will likely never gain sufficient familiarity with it to commit to practicing the faith in the long run.

> Generally speaking, no religious influence besides mom and dad is positioned to demonstrate convincingly to children the desirability of practicing the Catholic faith.

As "sponsors," "gatekeepers," and "interpreters" of the Catholic faith for their children, parents give children a glimpse of what Catholicism seems to be all about and whether or not it can meaningfully inform one's day-to-day life.

Because parents' commitment to practice and transmit Catholicism in the household is so demonstrably different from mainstream American culture, we found that those parents who embraced the three roles listed above were the ones who succeeded in transmission. They understood religious transmission to be a holistic, foundational household commitment of high priority rather than simply as one aspect of life alongside others. Successful parents were more likely to express how unimaginable and untenable family life would be without religion; their homes were more replete with visible religious art, and they had little difficulty reporting meaningful conversations and common experiences among the family that related to religion. By contrast, those parents who were less successful in transmission described households with a thinner religious atmosphere. It is not that these parents did not intend or desire to transmit their Catholicism, but rather that their aspirations did not translate into the establishment of a vivid Catholic culture in the home.

Ultimately, the decisive question our interviews suggested to us was this: had children been initiated into a cultural worldview where they perceived that being Catholic *mattered*, where faith had been so thoroughly and convincingly modeled, lived and shared that children either perceived no alternative to embracing Catholicism, or far preferred being Catholic to any other path? Had children been initiated into a lived template for carrying on a Catholic way of life, for navigating the twists and turns of growing up with their faith as a guiding resource?



If children do not "see" Catholicism in the "face" of their parents, they will likely never gain sufficient familiarity with it to commit to practicing the faith in the long run.

PART TWO

Four Components that Produce and Shape the Religious Household and Snapshots of Effective Transmission

It might now be helpful to explain with more precision what goes into creating a "religious culture" in the household: we must clarify its foundations, the mechanisms by which it is constructed, the material that constitutes the edifice, and the means by which it works its effects. We have conceived the following framework in order to describe the genesis of parents' religious attitudes and the process by which they are expressed in the home, thereby shaping the religious life of the household. In the emergence of every religious household, from the most devout to the most religiously cavalier, there are four components that describe the manner in which parents conceive, express and communicate their religious beliefs:

1) Parents' motivating narrative for transmission (the *why*): the story that parents tell of their own religious journey, a uniquely personal narrative which frames and motivates whether, why, and how they transmit their faith to their children.

2) Parents' degree of reflective intentionality in channeling the religious culture of the household in a purposeful direction (the *how*): the question here is whether parents ever eschew "auto-pilot" mode—an unreflective immersion in day-to-day activities, religious or otherwise—in order to consider not just their



global aims for household life, but also what sorts of practices are necessary to achieve those aims.

3) Religious content (the *what*): religiously significant practices, relationships, and experiences to which children are exposed through the influence of parents.

4) Enacted interpretation of family's religious commitments (events of availability of faith to children): discrete events, regular occasions, or extended processes by which children are not merely exposed to religious content, but through which they perceive religion's significance to their parents' lives, their family's life, and their own orientation to the world.

From the first item on this list to the fourth, there is a coherent sequence which describes a general process of *communication:* from 1) parents' religious belief as a preexisting given, to 2) parents' conscious reflection upon whether and how to share it, to 3) the concrete giving over of the faith, and finally to 4) the consummative act of a child's receiving and seeing for herself what has been communicated.

By assessing how the parents we interviewed were doing with regard to each of these four items, we could generally either isolate the specific points at which parents were

weakened in their chances of transmission, or, if all four items were effectively woven together into an integral whole, explore why their transmission seemed to be proceeding so well. Failure with regard to any of these four dimensions (except for the first, which is a given) jeopardizes the chances of transmission. In the following pages, we will discuss the criteria for "success" in each dimension.

The framework we have formulated here is our best attempt to describe the essential hallmarks of successful transmission that separated such cases from those of limping or failed transmission. It goes without saying that an innumerable array of causal factors that also influence success or failure cannot be considered here, but are worthy of further investigation, factors such as parenting style and developmental psychology. Further, our framework represents a predominant pattern in the cases that we studied, not a hard and fast law. Some parents who have done many of the wrong things have children who end up being highly religious adults, and other parents who seem to have done the right things see their children fail to become practicing Catholics in adulthood.

GENERAL COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Parents' religious belief as a preexisting given



Parents' conscious reflection upon whether and how to share it



The concrete giving over of the faith



The consummative act of a child's receiving and seeing for herself what has been communicated

One of our foremost aims is to demonstrate that successful transmission of Catholicism is possible and actually taking place in American families today. Accordingly, we will introduce you to parents in three different homes who have excelled in transmitting their faith to their children. Despite the many differences between these households, parents in all three have succeeded to this point. They have drawn upon both their own experiences of formation in the Catholic faith and upon the worldviews endowed by those experiences in order to build a religious culture in the home that orients their children toward a lifelong practice of the faith. The stories of the parents of these households serve to illustrate our generic descriptions of our four dimensions of religious transmission. Revealed in their talk is a rich cultural world of attitudes, hopes, aspirations, and conceptions of faith and parental responsibility.

SHERRY

Single Mother in Transition

Age: 42

Household status: Single mother living in the Midwest

Children: two sons, ages 18 and 16; daughter, 12

Religious background: Raised by Catholic mother and non-baptized father; converted to Catholicism in 20s

Church involvement: Weekly Mass attendance tapered to monthly following her divorce; active volunteer

Sherry is 42 years old, with a bouncy personality and bright red hair. She is a single mother of three: two teenage sons, 18 and 16, and a daughter who is twelve. She makes her home in a former industrial town in the Midwest where she works as a receptionist at a local television station. Sherry has confronted some formidable challenges in the last several years, which she says prompted some difficult but necessary shifts of perspective and decisions in her life, decisions that have made her happier, more independent, and more in alignment with what she believes God wants for her. Six years ago, her mother died of cancer at a tragically young age, and only recently, in the last year or two, she and her husband of 22 years divorced. He had developed a gambling addiction which he hid from the family, having grown emotionally aloof from her and their children. Only in the last several months has Sherry—lacking any pension or Social Security, since she had been a stay-at-home mom—begun working again: "Lotta praying, lotta soul-searching, and I thought, I can do this. I want to be happy." In the last few months she has also begun dating again, after meeting a single dad at her daughter's Girl Scouts meetings. At this point in her life, Sherry is in a hopeful state of transition. Her faith has been heavily tested and profoundly strengthened by what she has undergone in life.

As a mom, Sherry calls herself "the parent that all kids want." In all situations, she tries to inject humor. She wants her children to know that "no matter what, we can laugh at ourselves"; there is no need to be "stuffy" all the time. She allows them to make mistakes, not expecting them to be "perfect angels." Recently, after her divorce, she took her children on the family's first vacation in many years, a road trip to Florida. She marvels at how, despite being financially strapped, her kids were able to enjoy swimming in the ocean, picnicking for lunch and eating out for dinner: "What I can do with pennies is amazing." It is important to Sherry that her sons' friends feel comfortable and welcome in her modest home, where she hosts video game and pizza hang outs, even if it means that she and her daughter have to squeeze into her bedroom and watch movies on Netflix while the boys have their fun. And though parenting has presented her with challenges—her oldest son silently endured years of bullying for being overweight,

> In all situations, she tries to inject humor. She wants her children to know that "no matter what, we can laugh at ourselves."

and her younger two children struggle academically due to ADD—she has remained steadfast in her love and support of them. "You know I still every night tell my kids I love 'em and knock on the door and tell them goodnight…Since [they were] infants, I was the first thing they saw in the morning and the last thing they saw before they went to bed. For the most part I'm still that. And that's a privilege." Even now, especially after the divorce, she makes sure to check in one-on-one with each of her children: "Every week, I sit down with each one of them alone, and I ask them how are things going with them, with their friends, what's going on, are they okay with me, with their dad…I'm hoping they've always been very open and honest with me. I mean I can't say that for a fact, but I'm thinking so."

Sherry's faith is as vibrant and lively as her personality. Growing up, she, like her father, was never baptized, though her mother was a committed Catholic and much more religious than her dad. Her most profound religious memories from childhood are of helping her mother prepare gift baskets for the poor during Thanksgiving and Christmas. Sherry opted to go through RCIA and was baptized a Catholic in her early 20s, shortly after becoming a wife and mom. She describes herself as "compassionate," a "great friend," and a serial laugher, crediting above all her mother and her faith for making her the way she is. Her two sons attended Catholic grade school up to 8th grade and her daughter through 6th grade, though the family has lately opted for public schools due to their tight financial situation. She herself has helped out at the parish in almost every imaginable capacity. As she says, "Anything that had a volunteer wrapped around it, it was me."

Since her divorce, Sherry and her children have been going to Mass less than weekly, around once a month. She feels a sense of shame, of "Catholic guilt," over her divorce and her new relationship. In addition, she wants to shield her children from having to answer questions about their father or to hear gossip that is unflattering to him. She vows that eventually they will begin attending church again on a weekly basis: "We need to get back to where we were." Given her history of devotion to her Catholic faith, and that this faith is one of the core values of her parenting, it would be reasonable to guess the hiatus she and her family have taken from weekly Mass attendance will prove to be temporary.

SIMONA & MANUEL

Catholic Parenting in a New Country

Ages: 37

Household status: Immigrants from Belize living in heavily Hispanic Chicago neighborhood

Children: three daughters, ages 12, 7, and 5

Religious background: Raised in a traditional, Catholic village in Belize; returned to a more dedicated practice of the faith after not being very religious as teenagers and young adults

Church involvement: Weekly Mass attendance; serve as lectors and ushers

Simona and Manuel are Belizean immigrants, both 37, living in a heavily Hispanic, gentrifying neighborhood in Chicago. Both have gentle, soft-spoken personalities and speak English quite fluently. Simona is quick to flash a big smile and exhibit her airy, friendly personality, while Manuel is more serious and reflective, a pleasant and insightful man to interview. They live in a modest, busy and happy home, inhabiting one unit of a duplex, and they have three daughters, ages twelve, seven and five.

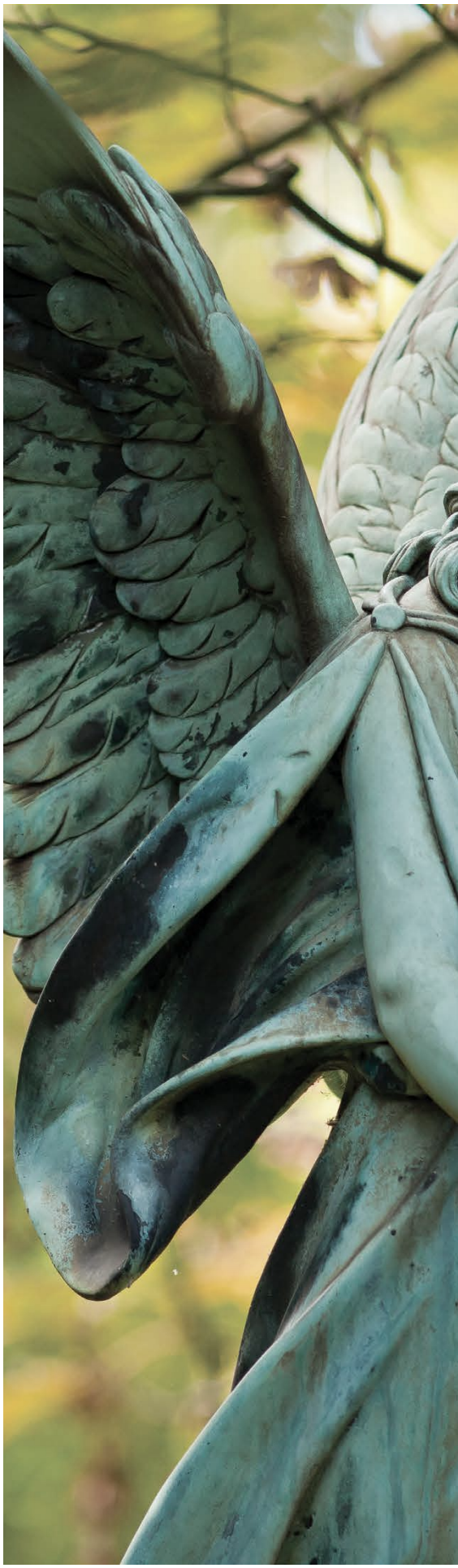
Shortly after Simona's family relocated to a small town in Belize when she was a teenager, Manuel knew that he wanted to ask out the "new girl." They began dating in high school—a fact which they try to hide from their young daughters!—were married at 20, and moved to the United States a few years later. Before they came to America, Manuel studied architectural technology in college but dropped out to work a government job. Simona attended technical school. Their reasons for emigrating had partly to do with finances and partly to do with lifestyle preference, as Manuel in particular desired to escape the slow, pedestrian pace of life in Belize and join some of his friends who had already come to America and who promised to help him find better-paying work. Manuel somewhat ruefully mentions that if he had remained in his government job in Belize, he would be able to retire by now, but he doesn't lose sleep over it. He explains: "I read once in a book of saints, [a] great Pope, that said that the thought of being somewhere else, being better somewhere else, is just an illusion." Their first daughter was born the same year that the couple moved to Chicago, to be followed eventually by two more girls.

Until recently, Manuel worked as a manager in the swimming pool industry, work which he enjoyed and which adequately supported the family's financial needs. However, when the company downsized, he lost his job and, in urgent need of work, found a job in sales. This job has been difficult for him, an introverted type. He regrets that he often arrives home a bit grumpy and tired, the consequence of a nearly two-hour commute from the suburbs amid thick traffic. His wife has suggested a

remedy, which he has been slow to embrace: "He hate, hates exercising. He has never exercised in his life! I think he ran on the treadmill for, I mean two times in all his life." To supplement Manuel's income, Simona bakes and sells cakes, a business she would like to expand someday, but which for now grows through word of mouth and Facebook photos of her handiwork. Eventually, they hope to return to Belize; it has been hard to be so far from most of their family. However, they acknowledge that America is all their daughters have ever known and that it is likely they will want to stay here into college and beyond.

As parents, both Simona and Manuel report awareness of the balance they have to strike between being an authority over their children and being their friend. Manuel is generally more gruff. Though he wants his children to be able to "come to him for anything," he also is clear about who is in charge: "I'm the one that is responsible and I'll let you know what goes and what doesn't go." Simona seems to be the gentler disciplinarian, but once her husband has pronounced a punishment, she will not undercut it, preferring that they simply revise the punishment the next time a similar incident arises. As a stay-at-home mom, Simona gets to spend more time with their daughters; the lanes of communication between them are generally open.

Religiously, both were raised in a traditional, Catholic village in Belize. In fact, Simona's father is an ordained deacon. However, neither she nor Manuel instinctively self-identifies as the kind of person who is "very religious" by innate disposition, nor do they report having been very religious as teenagers or young adults. In their first few years in Chicago, in fact, they didn't attend Mass regularly. Says Simona: "When we moved here, it was so different…and we hadn't found a church, and I felt





so bad that we wouldn't go to church on Sunday." She recounts the conversations she used to have with her father during this time: "'Did you go to church today?' And, 'No, I didn't go to church.' And he would always say, 'Remember you have to give time to God, too, and, go pray, go visit him, you know.'"

However, about six years ago, Manuel, and as a result, his entire family, underwent something of a religious renaissance, returning to a more dedicated practice of their native faith. What was the occasion? Manuel had developed a drinking problem. The pastor of the parish where his children attended school—a man whom Manuel now reveres and regards with the greatest loyalty and gratitude—intervened directly after Manuel sought his help. According to Manuel, after having hit "rock bottom," his priest, Fr. Barry, "made me see, you know, if you put God in your life things can change. Things will change."

He hasn't had a drink in six years. Additionally, the family began attending Mass weekly—he has only missed once in six years, due to a fever—and religion has become a point of much greater emphasis in the household. His daughters altar serve, and Manuel is in charge of hospitality and the collection at the evening Mass on Sundays. He has recently been invited to serve as a lector. For Manuel, these contributions are not casual volunteer work. They are highly significant to him because they signify the fundamental commitments of his life of sobriety: a sense of responsibility to Fr. Barry, an appreciation of the faith that healed him of his alcoholism, and a dedication to the community in which he found healing.

ALEX & CHARLOTTE

Founded and Built on Faith

Ages: mid-30s

Household status: Live in Chicago where Alex works in finance and Charlotte stays at home

Children: three daughters, ages 9, 6, and 3; son, 6

Religious background: Raised in Catholic homes; faith was a constant in Charlotte's life while Alex returned to more active participation after he met his wife doing postgraduate service

Church involvement: Weekly mass attendance; children attend Catholic school

At first glance, Charlotte and Alex seem like polar opposites. She is the product of a religiously and socially conservative family hailing from rural southern Illinois, and he, Jesuit- and Ivy League-educated, grew up in the wealthy and bustling northern suburbs of Chicago; she is reserved and meticulous with a dry, pleasant, and self-deprecating sense of humor, while he is gregarious and effusive, a grown man nevertheless exuding teenage vigor and forthrightness. She showed up to our interview wearing a neat, striped t-shirt with minimal jewelry and straight brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. He sported a head full of dark, grey-flecked hair peeking out beneath his baseball cap to go with a loose t-shirt, jeans, and Nikes. Charlotte and Alex's relationship seems to verify the cliché that "opposites attract," as they have now been happily married for ten years. They have a nine-year-old daughter, six-year-old twins (a boy and a girl), and a three-year-old daughter. The family makes its home in Chicago, in a neighborhood adjacent to that of Manuel and Simona's. They also attend the same parish and send their children to the same school as Manuel and Simona. The couple owns their home, a three-bedroom house, within a few blocks of a park and a popular row of cafes, bars and restaurants. When we first arrived at their house on a sunny Saturday morning, Alex had to excuse himself from the Marvel Superheroes board game he had been playing with his son at the dining room table.

From the beginning, religion has been a central point of connection between Alex and Charlotte; they have never clashed in their intention to hand on their faith to their children. Whereas events of trauma and personal struggle were important aspects of our other households' religious biographies, Charlotte and Alex's domestic life has been relatively untroubled. Though they are both from Illinois, they met while doing postgraduate service in Vancouver at a Catholic shelter for homeless teens. He had come there from Dartmouth and she from Illinois State. For Charlotte, the transition to a postgraduate religious environment was fairly natural. "Church was always a constant" in her childhood, and she, a self-reported "rule follower,"

was always comfortable in and around Catholicism, as evidenced by her undergraduate involvement in campus ministry retreats, the Newman Center, and spring break service trips ("I herded sheep on a Navajo reservation—it was really cool"). For Alex, by contrast, those years of service were the occasion of a religious reorientation. After growing up in a thoroughly Catholic home and even feeling interested in the priesthood at one point as a teenager, he drifted from his faith in college, and pursued postgraduate volunteering as an opportunity to live more in line with how he was raised. Many of his peers were headed into careers in banking or to law school, but he couldn't envision such a path for himself: "[A lot of people] were sort of like jump[ing] from one sort of really self-oriented thing to another…Not that I have any judgment to that, I just couldn't see that as something that was gonna be helpful for me, right?" Reflecting upon those years and how his relationship with his wife grew out of their shared experience of serving Vancouver's homeless, he observes: "Talk about a formative part in your life… [It's] like my community house never ended, right?" After their year together in Vancouver, they returned to Chicago, dated for another two years, and got married. As parents, Alex and Charlotte play complementary roles. Charlotte stays at home with the children while Alex commutes daily to the suburbs, working in corporate finance. He had taken this position within the last six months after spending several years in investment banking, a well-paying position but one which removed him from his children for days and even weeks at a time. Charlotte herself did not get married intending to be a stay-at-home mom. She had worked for several years at an insurance company, but when their first child was born, she saw no purpose in staying at a job she

> From the beginning, religion has been a central point of connection between Alex and Charlotte; they have never clashed in their intention to hand on their faith to their children.

didn't particularly enjoy. Since then her life has "just kind of snowballed into mommy land." She helps her children with their homework, does hands-on religious instruction, and keeps them occupied in their spare time with musical instruments, sports, museum outings, picnics, and a little bit of television. During the summer she stages "Mommy Camp," complete with "Water Wednesdays" and "Thinking Thursdays." Though she is the schedule-keeper, chauffeur, and co-teacher of her children, she is also in a sense their friend. At this point, she says that she can talk with her nine-year-old about anything. Both she and her husband highly value "Mommy-Daughter" or "Daddy-Daughter" time, so that their children don't have to feel like they are merely "part of the herd family." Given that his wife is the lead parent when it comes to logistical matters, Alex tends to describe his own role as simply being present to his children when he can, spending his weekends with them, accompanying them to Mass on Sundays, playing board games with them, and encouraging their growth toward independence and maturity.

The First Component: Motivating Narrative

There is a sense in which parenting decisions are basically narratival: they grow out of parents' understanding of where they come from, what experiences constitute their identity, and what they value as a result. Their narration of the past informs their vision of the future, that is, where they wish their children and their family to go and according to which values. Any parent who to any degree wishes to pass on the Catholic faith to his or her children does so because faith is an element in this personal history. The personal significance that being Catholic holds for a parent is generally identical to the motive that will prompt him to hand it down to his children. Such motives are the seed of a family's commitment to faith, which will subsequently develop (or not) according to whether parents properly commit themselves to transmission. However, these motives are initially not deliberately chosen, and they often operate without conscious reflection. They are "baked into" parents' personal histories and are bound up

with the structure of their personality and their style of parenting. Because all parents' religious stories are unique, the ground, texture, and feel of the faith that each of them hands on to their children will be likewise unique, leading to a rich diversity in the religious temperaments, tones, and emphases that pervade the American Catholic home. Some are more religiously authoritarian, others less; some are more theologically and ecclesiologically articulate, others are "simpler" believers; some, intent on distinguishing themselves from the secular mainstream, would reflexively self-identify as "really religious," while others, in many cases no weaker in their belief, would consider themselves simply run-of-the-mill Catholics. These sorts of differences are all, in some manner, a function of parents' varying motivations for handing on the faith.

Though the specific contours of every parent's religious biography are irreducibly unique, broader themes did emerge from our interviews which allowed for a basic subdivision of the types of reasons parents transmit their faith. We found that two spouses of differing motives could successfully collaborate in transmission—since these motives are not at all mutually exclusive—so long as they presented a united front to their children. However, when individual parents articulated the religious narrative by which they understand themselves and their religious parenting, one or the other of these would tend to prove dominant. The reasons included:

- The dogmatic motive ("I transmit Catholicism because it is true and right.")
- The individualistic motive ("I want my children to feel the influence of Catholicism in accordance with the way that I have individually." E.g., *Manuel*.)
- The communal motive ("The fulfillment we have found in Catholic parish/communal life is the reason why we're Catholic.")
- The "morale boost" motive ("Family life is just happier and better with God, and sadder and harsher without God." E.g., *Sherry*.)
- The ethnic motive ("Being Catholic is who we are and who our family in generations past has always been." E.g., *Simona*.)
- The formational motive ("Being Catholic best forms our children into the kind of people we want them to become." E.g., *Alex and Charlotte*.)
- The moralistic motive ("Being Catholic helps our children make good life decisions.")

Each of these seminal motives can give rise to a vibrant Catholic home that succeeds in transmission, since that outcome generally depends on how well parents

do with regard to the other elements of transmission, detailed later in this report. Still, certain motives tended to produce effective religious households more frequently than others. For example, parents driven by the dogmatic, morale-boosting, and formational motives were effective more often than those emphasizing the individualistic, ethnic, and moralistic motives. Parents who espoused the individualistic motive often failed to adequately communicate their faith or build the culture of the home on its basis, and those of the ethnic or moralistic motive tended to be less genuinely committed to their faith. By contrast, a parent who deeply believes Catholicism to be true (dogmatic motive), can demonstrate how religion brings joy to the home (morale boost motive), or is convinced that Catholicism offers a deeply rewarding way of life (formational motive) is more likely to evince a deeply held and highly authentic faith, which, as we have said, is the chief predictor of effective transmission.

SHERRY

Life with Faith is "Beautiful"

How does Sherry describe her motive for handing on the faith? Essentially, it boils down to a simple formula: both family life and life in general are meaningful, kindly, and rich when God is involved, and callous, harsh, and unrelenting when God is absent. The distinction between these two ways of life, one with God and one without God, structures the way she lives her life and informs the values that she wishes to impart through the practice of faith to her children. She is literate in Catholic ways of describing this distinction, such as Pope Francis' mention of "throwaway culture." According to Sherry, in a "throwaway" culture, people are not seen to have worth or dignity: "People have value and worth, and I think that we're so wrapped up in our own situation that we're blinded to things going on around us." From her youth, the religious role models and practices she knew formed her against such a "throwaway" mindset. As soon as she was old enough to drive, she was delivering gift baskets to single mothers. "To see these young mothers who had nothing and brought them a basket with food, and treats and gifts, and they just cried and held you…It's very overwhelming…That just tattoos you…And so I try to teach my children there is always someone worse off than you." She makes sure her children see her pull food off their own shelves in order to donate to the poor, and she has taken her children at regular intervals to the local homeless shelter. Why do these things? "Because if we don't nurture [these people], there's so much loneliness and [so many] unlovables in the world and if we're all that cold, it's gonna be a scary place." When asked what is most wrong with the world today, Sherry replies: "I think too many people are trying to get God out of everything… I think we need God there more now than ever."

Additionally, when Sherry describes how rich and joyous a life of faith should be, she invokes traditional Catholic practices to capture the essence of what that richness looks like. When asked how important it is to her that her children share her beliefs when they are older, she replies: "I want us to be able someday to all go [to church] together. I mean that would be beautiful… Like my mother got each of the boys a Christening bonnet, and you snip a few stiches and it becomes their wife's hankie for their marriage. You know…the little things like that." At another point, she adds: "I can't imagine [not having the Catholic faith]—even from a little girl, my mom's family being Catholic, I mean my Aunt Helen, my great aunt, made a lamb cake every Easter, and I still do it! I can't imagine not having those parts." We spoke to several parents who, like Sherry, reported that their basic motive for transmitting their faith was that having a sense of God essentially makes life better, richer, and more bearable. However, few parents were so utterly convinced of the vast difference between a life lived with God and a life lived without God as Sherry was, and few parents understood as intuitively as she how Catholic language and practices carry forward that worldview.

SIMONA & MANUEL

An Ethnic Faith Vitalized by Personal Experience

Whereas Sherry's practice of Catholicism was from the beginning motivated by a desire to imbue the entire household with a communal sense of how faith makes life better, fuller, and more joyous, Simona and Manuel's motive changed very abruptly at a distinct point in time. Until their eldest daughter was about six, they half-heartedly transmitted their Catholicism for largely ethnic reasons: they had been raised Catholic in Belize and identified as Catholic more or less as a matter of course. We saw how, in their transition to a new environment, they had ceased to attend Mass on Sundays and how Simona's father, a deacon, had prodded them to go more often. Manuel's individual experience of religious awakening, in which he overcame his drinking problem through the indispensable figure of Fr. Barry and his own growing sense of inclusion and responsibility within the parish community, marked a turning point. From that point forward, he determined that the stabilizing and orienting force of his own life would become that of his entire family. This is how he describes it:

Without God, I think your life can be a very lonely, dark place…You know, I've been at the point that I was involved in the church, drifted away, hit rock bottom and decided to go to church again. So I know. I know how it feels to be without God. And I know now that if I would have been with God through all those years, I would have never been

to the point where I was. So I think [my children] need to learn that God is the number one thing in their lives from the beginning. I think their lives would be much, much easier [with that idea in mind]… That without God, they…it's not that they don't have anything, but everything becomes far more difficult.

Much of Manuel's language is similar to Sherry's: they share their convictions about the darkness of life without God, and the need to make faith in God a number-one priority. The difference between him and Sherry is subtle: Sherry's faith was always concerned with how to establish a religious culture in the home, but Manuel's faith initially came by individual conversion. Transmission in his case has therefore required an additional effort to embody and communicate the significance of that conversion to his children.

What about Simona? Is she as motivated as Manuel and for the same reasons? At this point, the answer seems to be "not totally." Manuel is the religious "point person" in the family, and Simona is content to play a secondary role; she has never identified herself as a "very religious" kind of person, and, unlike Manuel, has never had a dramatic individual experience of faith. Rather, she happily goes along for the ride, already formed by and familiar with Catholicism; it is not strange to her that her husband has become significantly more religious. Even if she, unlike her husband, struggles to explain with conviction how life would be different without religion ("Um, I think you aren't so judgmental, not so mean"), she notes with prosaic approval that her husband has become more religious: "But now he's started going to church more. And he's become very good friends with Fr. Barry. I think Fr. Barry is influencing him a lot." After all, even if she hasn't always been a strong Catholic, she has now become more faithful due to her husband's increased enthusiasm. Looking back, she realizes that this faith has always been a part of who she is: "It's important to me. I was brought up that way… My faith keeps me going. Yeah. I just believe in that."

CHARLOTTE & ALEX

The Desire to Form a Christ-like Person

Whereas Sherry's efforts at religious transmission are most motivated by a desire to make the household community a happy and "beautiful" place, and Manuel enlisted Simona's help in deploying his own individual religious conversion as an animating force of household life, Charlotte and Alex's efforts at transmission are driven by their desire to guide their children toward becoming *certain kinds of people*. They began their journey as parents, perhaps without even fully realizing it, with a deeply held notion, rooted in their Catholic worldview, of what constitutes a good and worthwhile way of life. In a sense, their religious



parenting began during the year they shared in Vancouver in that Catholic community dedicated to the corporal works of mercy. It was there that the animating religious ideals of their own relationship were brought to the fore and established as a fundamental aspect of their entire prospective family life. Alex summarizes his appreciation of Christianity in these terms:

I love the fact that Jesus was this guy who just had this totally radical way of living. Still completely nobody, I mean nobody, [lives] this. I mean he literally says, "Hey guys, everyone should do this," [but] no one does it…Like people probably should. Why don't I? I don't know; I probably got a bunch of excuses, but why doesn't anybody? I don't know, they can probably tell you some BS reason why—me [included]. Who actually gives the shirt off their back? Who actually turns [the other cheek]? So it's like the challenge [of that way of life] and the fact that it's just perfect. To me, [the life of Jesus] is like a perfect story.

One can trace Alex's religious hopes for his children back to these same convictions about resisting selfishness and living up to the challenge of merciful compassion in imitation of Jesus. Such an outlook on Christianity mingles with how he and his wife teach their children the life of prayer and how they construe their discipleship as parents:

[Charlotte] just has a similar outlook on the role of spirituality; it's about actions, it's about what you do, how

you interact with people. I think she's very conscientious about being spiritual with the kids. She'll say prayers with them and…I think that would be really tough for me to imagine being with a partner that wasn't [so faithful]…I mean, she's an inspiration to me, in terms of just being faithful.

According to Alex, spirituality is "about actions," "what you do," "interacting with people." Such a way of living goes hand in hand with teaching prayers and other religious practices. The combination of communal prayer and socially enacted discipleship that Alex and Charlotte practiced at the beginning of their relationship continues to suffuse their home today.

The Second Component: Parents' Degree of Reflective Intentionality in Channeling the Culture of the Household in a Purposeful Direction

This may be both the most obvious element of transmission and the least practiced: parents must think about it. "What must I do to make my children's world Catholic?" is a question that must frame their religious awareness. Rising above the everyday hubbub of domestic life, parents must consider how they wish to channel religious activity in the household purposefully in accord with their values and goals. Such reflection allows parents to generate coherence and consistency in the religious administration of their home, qualities which are crucial to a child's perception that faith makes sense, that it can structure one's attitudes, activities, and relationships, and that it is valid across life's many experiences and stages of growth. Those parents who achieve such coherence are at lesser risk of subverting their goals by means of dissonant modeling and unintentionally de-prioritizing religion in the family.

Catholic parents who nominally are interested in transmission but who generally do not reflect on Catholic culture-building in the home—that is, parents who basically place the household on religious "auto-pilot" and assume that faith will get through by osmosis—face a much higher risk of seeing their children drift from any sense of Catholic rootedness and identity. There are several reasons this failure may occur. Parents themselves may be merely half-hearted in their resolution to hand on their faith, or they may espouse an excessively individualistic sense of piety. Finally, many parents are simply unable to devote sufficient energy and attention to the task of deliberate reflection.



> Rising above the everyday hubbub of domestic life, parents must consider how they wish to channel religious activity in the household purposefully in accord with their values and goals.

SHERRY

"If you don't encourage and nurture it, they'll never have it."

Given that Sherry joined the Catholic Church only after she had become a wife and mother and in order to imitate her own religiously exemplary mother, it is not surprising that the broader implications of her own religious commitment for the household have always commanded a large share of her attention. She intended all her volunteer work at the parish to bring the Catholic faith nearer to her children's lives. Whether it was sitting on parish committees, planning children's programming, chaperoning at Vacation Bible School (VBS) for ten consecutive years, or participating in the parish's social outreach, the important thing was that the kids "got to see mom in the building." When asked if there was anything about her parenting that she regretted, she considered whether it was a mistake to spend so much time at the parish rather than at work, given that she is now single and without a financial safety net. Ultimately, she concluded: "There's not a lot I would do differently. I'm proud of the years I've spent devoted to my parish, 'cause that was also devoted to my kids."

Perhaps the greatest proof of Sherry's high degree of self-awareness and intentionality as a religious parent is how she repeatedly described herself as responsible for providing a good religious example to her children. She was quick to identify herself as the foremost religious influence in her children's lives, a role she feels comfortable in not because she is any sort of expert

theologian, but because she wants to teach her children a basic attitude to life: "I don't know everything obviously, but I think that the fundamentals and our morals and everything …you know the Ten Commandments and how to use those in everyday life. 'Cause we shouldn't be jealous. We shouldn't be petty…I tried to lead by example." She used to attend daily Mass at the school parish with her children, choosing to sit one-on-one with each of them on a rotating basis, in sight of their friends at school: "You know, the kids enjoyed seeing mom…And it's nice to have one-on-one time with each of them 'cause since I have three and [there's only] one mom, it's nice to rotate around." It is clear that Sherry has always felt a profound sense of responsibility for her children's formation in the Catholic faith, not simply expecting her own commitment of faith to naturally "trickle down" to her children. Sherry is insistent that her children's religious formation *depends* on her choices and modeling: "If you don't encourage and nurture [their faith], they'll never have it."

SIMONA & MANUEL

Complementary Roles to Support Dad's Resolve

Though Manuel's recovery from alcoholism was a profoundly personal religious event, his greatest motivation to change was the kind of affection and example he wanted to provide for his daughters. In other words, his growth in faith was not just a "private" event, compartmentalized and hidden away from the normal run of family life. While he used to "think about myself before anybody else," he says his recovery and the family's increased commitment to faith have launched their common life in a new direction. They now have a "foundation" such that they won't have to "suffer through their lives" and will always "have something to go back to and say, 'Okay, this is what I need.'" As hard as he works, his favorite weekend pastime used to be watching European soccer with friends, beer in hand, the memory of which presently "doesn't sit well" with him. Nowadays he has learned to enjoy spending more time with his girls; against his own acknowledged authoritarian streak, he admits that he has "something to learn" from all of his daughters, even his five-year-old. Clearly, Manuel is a different father than he used to be. For him, becoming a better parent and growing in faith go inextricably hand in hand. In fact, the one family activity in which all these changes are summed up is weekly Mass, since it is there that he gets to share the commitments that most deeply define his new life: "Going to church. I think that's the most important, or the best way that I can show them what my faith is all about. Going to church and having them learn [from the readings and the homily], and giving your time [in volunteering], and listening and having that experience."

Though Manuel's conversion was the impetus for the shift in the direction of the family's life, Simona is still an important figure. Her willingness to harmonize with her husband's convictions and commitments renders the entire effort of transmission more credible and accessible to her children. There is no leakage here, even if she is not identifiable at first glance as a "really religious" person. And she, too, though less religiously articulate and reflective than her husband, affirms the importance of intentionality in religious parenting. When asked how she would feel if her children left the practice of their faith and returned later in life, she responds: "I think [that happens] because of the parents…'Cause I think they don't try to talk to them more about it and, and the importance of it. Like if you don't care, they won't care either, you know?" If one of her daughters were to cease the practice of her faith, even temporarily, it would mean "I didn't teach her anything, [that] I didn't teach her what it is to be a Catholic, to believe in God. I would feel, oh my God, [like] I didn't do good, [that] I didn't teach her well enough, you know."

CHARLOTTE & ALEX

The Parent as Believer and Teacher

One could say that Charlotte and Alex are "unreflectively reflective" about sharing their faith with their children. The Catholic faith is so foundational to their relationship with each other and the family they have built that they scarcely have needed to "stop and think" about whether they are delivering upon their intention to transmit their faith. The establishment of a common religious life in the household is a constitutive element of their understanding of discipleship. It consistently informs their sense of religious responsibility. When asked whether being a parent has altered her faith at all, Charlotte explains that the basic content of her faith has remained more or less unchanged, but her sense of *religious responsibility* has changed: "I guess maybe I'm more aware of what I'm doing during Mass because I'm also not only praying, worshipping, but I'm also teaching…This is what we do in Mass, you know, kneel. Mommy's kneeling, you should kneel. This is why we kneel."

For the sake of further illustration, consider the following excerpt of dialogue between Charlotte and our interviewer. The excerpt begins when Charlotte is asked whether she has chosen to consciously impart her own religious beliefs to her children, or whether she wishes to expose her children to a number of religious options before stepping back and allowing them to choose:

C: *I guess as a Catholic and my husband being Catholic and raising our children Catholic and having them baptized, [their having received] First Reconciliation, First Communion, that we're laying the foundation of teaching and guiding and fostering that road.*

I: Uh hmm.

C: *But if, as they grow up and become teenagers they can make their own choices and their own decisions, yeah I guess they can explore those avenues if they want. I would hope the foundation of the faith that we've put in them is a solid foundation and something that they believe in and trust and find comforting.*

I: Yeah, absolutely. So in in general, you're sort of living out a sense of obligation to kind of give them a strong foundation?

C: *Yeah. I think so… [It's] kind of our job. I mean, when I baptized my children I said, "I will raise them in the Catholic faith," you know, like I feel an obligation to that. And responsibility.*

I: Yeah. Um do you think that either parents or the Church are more responsible for teaching religious faith to kids?

C: *I think the parents are more responsible. I'm with them more. I can set an example in our daily life, whereas with Mass we [only] go once a week or twice a week.*

Our data shows that this kind of outlook on transmission is optimal for success: a sense of responsibility, a desire to lay a foundation, an earnest investment, and a corresponding hope that children will embrace the foundation they have been given. Alex echoes Charlotte's aspiration. When asked his opinion about the idea of parents' "exposing" their children to many religious options and allowing them to choose, he responds: "[In that case], you're really not exposing them to anything. You're essentially reading them the Wikipedia page for it. Which isn't anywhere close to the same thing as exposing someone, or really actually having that be an option for them."

We have seen that Charlotte realizes that it is primarily *her* responsibility, not that of clergy or religious professionals, to model and explain the Catholic faith. Further, the way she talks about her children's sacramental formation suggests that she doesn't consider the sacraments merely institutional rites that are solely the purview of religious professionals. Rather, they are experiences which she and her husband have consciously desired their children to undergo, and they come with responsibilities of preparation, teaching and accompaniment. Even if Charlotte does not self-identify as particularly zealous—"I'm 75% religious…I should go to confession more," she says with a laugh—her sense of religious obligation and her attention are trained on the right target: rendering the Catholic faith accessible to her children.

The Third Component: Religious Content

It is here that parents' resolution about transmission achieves its most concrete expression. The construction of a religious culture requires that parents expose their children to religious practices, activities, communities, relationships, opportunities for volunteerism, and programmatic formation. It is in the selection of such content and the concomitant investment of the family's resources of time and attention that parents move their home in a definite religious direction, in accordance with their reflection (or lack thereof) upon their religious motives. Successful transmission requires that parents weave a Catholic world around their children, providing them with a variety of mutually reinforcing religious content. Naturally, this includes weekly churchgoing, but more is required than that.

The ways that parents could expose their children to religious content are myriad. Some examples from our interviews included:

- Enlisting teenage youth to help teach CCD classes to younger kids
- Enrolling children in Catholic schools
- Praying the rosary as a family in the car on road trips
- Going on a religious pilgrimage as a family to see the original image of the Virgin of Guadalupe
- Sending children on international mission trips to monasteries and impoverished areas in South America
- Taking a child to confession with one specific priest at the parish, whom the child enjoys
- Listening regularly to spiritual books of Richard Rohr on CD or the Catholic Sirius radio station while riding in the car
- Having a devout grandmother babysit children frequently, teaching them how to pray and taking them to daily Mass
- Painting an image of Juan Diego's *tilma* (with the Virgin of Guadalupe) to help with a child's crafts project, and helping the child hang it on their wall at home
- Accompanying a teenage boy to the meetings of the Knights of Columbus, of which he is a member
- Regularly inviting their parish priests to join the family for dinner, especially if the priests are new to the community

- Enabling children to sing or play an instrument in the church choir
- Saying grace over meals and praying at bedtime one-on-one with each child
- Taking children to parish council meetings or other adult activities during which they must pass their time in and around church premises
- Attending the parish's Triduum services each year
- Making it a yearly tradition to have each child draw a saint's name out of a hat and spend the year researching and praying to the saint
- Fostering children's participation in youth programming, whether a high school youth group or campus ministry

Some of these are explicitly spiritual, liturgical practices, while others have to do with the cultivation of relationships or the expenditure of leisure time. Some are regular occurrences, while others were one-time affairs. However, every item represents one way that parents have given their children an additional point of reference for what values, relationships, and practices constitute a Catholic way of life. The more such content children encounter, and the more it promotes their personal engagement with the faith and gives them responsibility within the local Catholic community, the better.

SHERRY

Sponsor and Gatekeeper of the Parish, *Par Excellence*

Given our emphasis on the relatively large influence of parents compared to that of Catholic institutional actors, it is important to tell a complementary part of the story: that parish life can be an extremely potent, irreplaceable resource for parents who wish to form their children in the Catholic faith. Sherry's story is proof of this. She recalls most of the priests that have passed through her parish with fondness, relating how each of them in different ways had been a positive formative influence upon her family. Clearly the parish priest was an archetypal figure she leaned upon, well disposed to be surprised by his gifts, whether possessing the ability to remember every schoolchild's name or to give "amazing" homilies. When her children were younger, they participated in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, a Montessori program, and she can remember by name every catechist who ever instructed them. With glee, she recalls her children's acting in the annual Christmas pageant, how they graduated from playing shepherds to starring as Mary and Joseph. Her children also participated in Vacation Bible School during the summers, where she chaperoned for ten straight years. Early in their teenage years, her sons rented books from the parish library. And above all the other activities they have taken part in at the parish, she especially cherishes

putting care packages together for the poor, visiting the local homeless shelter and other places of refuge for the vulnerable, and ministering to the needs of families in the parish who are enduring hardship.

Furthermore, for Sherry there was never any question what kind of school she wanted her children to attend: "It was very important for me for them to go to Catholic school…I feel it's very important and [a] very strong [value]." Her two sons were enrolled in the parish school from kindergarten through eighth grade, and her daughter until middle school, when a tight budget required that she switch to a public school. Her two sons now likewise are enrolled in public high school. However, Sherry has been heartened by the youth group at her parish, and specifically by a youth minister there: "This woman's like Peter Pan, flock and kids. I mean [she's] like the piper and they just follow her." Though her oldest son shows less interest in youth group than his younger brother, it is easy to sense her relief and appreciation that another grown-up shares her load of religious modeling and formation. This is generally how she feels about all the adults, whether clergy, catechists, or school teachers, that have assisted her in her religious parenting.

We might call Sherry a "sponsor" of her parish community to her children: through her own activity at the parish, she not only *exposes* her children to this community, but *brings that community near* to them by regular engagement with it, *accompanying* their participation in parish life. As a result, all of Sherry's children have assumed *roles of responsibility* in parish programming. Her sons have both chaperoned VBS, her oldest has sung in the choir, and even her 12-year-old daughter is "helpin' the little angels get their wings on" at the annual Christmas pageant.

We would be remiss if we did not mention Sherry's commitment to prayer in the home. She recalls: "One of my favorite times in my life was teaching bedtime prayers, you know, and teaching the kids the rosary or Our Father." But she also lets her kids know that prayer doesn't always have to be formal: "I told the kids you don't have to go to the big white house to talk to God. They know you can just have a quiet moment, you know, in the bathtub, you know, and just relax and calm yourself." In fact, when her children were very young, Sherry and her mother collaborated in the effort to introduce the practice of prayer: "I remember—and even my mom too, when they were little, you know they had their Bible stories, and we started very young reading to them, and sharing faith with them." When her children were a bit older, she turned to Scripture pamphlets that accompanied the liturgical seasons. Family dinners, where the children drop their homework and get a break

from their extracurricular activities, are a priority of Sherry's, going hand in hand with their regular practice of saying grace. She recounts, "My boys' best friend Michael…his family is very busy, [always] 'Go, go, go!', runnin' around, several kids all goin' different directions. He used to love to come over and he finally told me why: 'Because you guys eat dinner at the table.'… And you know, that means something." As her children have become busier teenagers, she admits that such dinners are no longer a daily occasion and that intentional prayer time with the family has decreased since they were younger. However, she knows that her oldest son still regularly carries a rosary around in his pocket and that her middle child continues to wear a confirmation bracelet he received from his eighth-grade religion teacher. To a significant degree, her children seem to have retained the habit of prayer that she was so intentional about instilling in them when they were very young, even though family prayer has been less consistent as she has returned to work and her children have entered adolescence.

SIMONA & MANUEL

The Parish as Source of Belonging & Responsibility

The religious content to which Simona and Manuel expose their children is not extraordinary, but it is consistent, multifaceted, and undergirded by authentic faith. The family engages regularly in nighttime prayer just before bed and sporadically before meals and in the car; however, the single matrix of practices which tells the most about the religious culture of their home concerns the parish. Just as was the case with Sherry, the local parish is a central and indispensable resource for Simona and Manuel, especially because of their pastor, Fr. Barry. When asked if he would ever contemplate leaving their current parish, Manuel was resolute in his refusal to entertain such a possibility:

They've made a commitment to me, to my family. They've invested their time with us. To me it's just natural, if I've gotta worship God, I worship God with the people that I know care for me and I care for. I feel a good sense of pride being, or coming from St. _____'s. To me, it's very important that I stay there. They're very important [to] who we are and what we try to accomplish in the community, and I believe in Fr. Barry, I believe in what he's doing. So. There is no reason for me to [think about leaving].

The couple is beyond pleased with the school and the formation, religious and otherwise, that their children receive there, made financially possible by scholarships provided by the parish. Simona sees the benefits of this parochial school formation in her oldest daughter: "Gabriela is a really good girl. She's, she's really nice, she's very considerate, and I think it's

because of all they teach her, you know, about Jesus, and what God would, Jesus would do. And how the Apostles would, you know!? These things [are taught to her] in religion, I think."

Fr. Barry is a fixture in their children's lives. They not only hear him preach regularly at Sunday Mass, but they also see him in and around the school, and know of their father's close relationship with him. In fact, he is godfather to Manuel and Simona's youngest daughter. She was born just as Manuel was getting beyond his habit, and Fr. Barry agreed to assume the role on the condition that Manuel unfalteringly attend Mass while he raised her. The couple acknowledges that they lean upon the pastor to clarify the meaning of the weekly Scripture passages heard at Mass, and both parents relate that the entire family enjoys the stories he tells in his homilies. They are clearly relieved that there is such a competent theological and pastoral figure that



> Even though, as we have said, parental commitment is the sine qua non of successful transmission, the life of the parish has not lost its cardinal significance for family life and the formation of youth.

they can trust. Fr. Barry's leadership of the parish and his presence in the family's life have created a deep sense of religious belonging for Simona and Manuel's family.

With their father ushering every week at Mass and counting collection money, and their mother regularly helping with set-up and take-down at school and parish events, Simona and Manuel's three daughters have witnessed two models of lay involvement in the parish. With a little prodding from her father, 12-year-old Gabriela has smoothly found her place in this milieu, volunteering as an altar server. The responsibility she has assumed in this role seems to be a relatively important point of self-identity for her. She regularly serves weddings, funerals, and *quinceañeras*, and she was even chosen to help with the late Cardinal Francis George's funeral Mass, which was a big deal for her. Says her mother: "Yeah, she does [like altar serving]… Even though sometimes she's tired and she's sweaty under the gown and under that, she says she feels good that she helped out and she was there." In addition, Gabriela has made a new friend while altar serving, a young female parish employee who coordinates liturgies and whom she now considers a confidante. This woman once informed a surprised and amazed Manuel that his daughter was keeping a wedding journal, but told him not to worry: there was no boyfriend or groom yet, only plans for altar servers, bridesmaids, and a dress. Says Manuel, "I think it's great…That [shows] me [all] the time that she puts to developing a relationship with Gabriela." No doubt due to the influence of Gabriela, their middle daughter, who is still only seven, looks forward to the day she can begin altar serving. For now, she must remain content with taking the collection basket up to Fr. Barry with her dad on Sundays.

For Simona and Manuel, then, the parish has been an utterly irreplaceable and versatile resource, offering many benefits—from communal belonging to spiritual counsel, from the education of their

children to the provision of opportunities for growth and responsibility. Even though, as we have said, parental commitment is the *sine qua non* of successful transmission, the life of the parish has not lost its cardinal significance for family life and the formation of youth; rather, it is up to parents to *utilize* that cardinal resource, facilitating a mutual flow between parish life and home life.

CHARLOTTE & ALEX

The Stay-At-Home Mom as Religious Formator

The institutional Catholic world in which Charlotte and Alex have involved their children is very similar to that of Simona and Manuel, since they belong to the same parish. Charlotte and Alex's three oldest children attend the same parish school, where they undergo First Communion preparation, read Bible stories, and take part in toiletry drives for the poor. They are pleased with the education their children are receiving: "I like the way the school is going with the religious teaching," says Charlotte. Her eldest daughter, the nine-year-old, has "adored" all of her teachers. Charlotte is very appreciative: "It's kind of fun to see them looking up to other adult authorities… and seeing what those adults are passionate about. Like her teacher loves to travel, she's been all over the world and brings that into the classroom and [my daughter] really likes that." All of their children's friends are from the parish and school, and they see each other every Sunday at Mass.

Like Manuel, Alex has great admiration for Fr. Barry and a substantial personal relationship with him: "Very dynamic priest. Everyone loves him. Knows everybody. I mean literally everybody. Says Mass for the Bears, you know what I mean. Like everyone knows Fr. Barry. It's amazing." The priest had been a mentor to Alex back in his teenage years and reconnected with him when he realized that Alex lived near the parish where he had received his new pastoral assignment. Up to that point, Alex and his wife had been attending Mass consistently, but at a different church, one not connected to any parish community. As Charlotte recalls it: "And then Fr. Barry came to the parish, he's like, 'Why aren't you going here?' and we were like 'I don't know!'" Fr. Barry, then, was the key influence who linked Alex and Charlotte to their current Catholic community. When asked what his opinions were of the Catholic Church as an institution, Alex was eager to dispense with the customary debates about Church teachings and authority, and instead wanted to talk about Fr. Barry:

I feel like the organized part of the church has given me Fr. Barry, right? It's given me this mentor, this person I really respect, who I want to be in contact with, I want to see, baptized all my kids, confirmed me…you know, Charlotte and I, did our wedding. I mean that's

part of the organized church and I really appreciate that.

His children have grown up around Fr. Barry, they know how close their father is to him, and they enjoy listening to him preach at Mass. Dad's and the family's close relationship to Fr. Barry is something "we talk about all the time."

Though they did not seem to realize it, the domestic religious life of Charlotte and Alex's home was unusually vibrant, multi-sided, participative, and in coherent alignment with their religious convictions and values. Because Alex often works late, Charlotte has comfortably assumed the role of chief religious instructor of her children—even if her work is supplemented by the catechesis her children receive at school. This does not mean that Alex is uninvolved; he helps when he can, is always there at Mass on Sundays with his kids, "helping" and "leading them" through the different parts of the Mass, and is certainly someone who is an "open book" religiously. Their kids can ask him anything and know what a major role religion plays in his life. Two of the most unusual traits of the household's religious life are, first, the degree to which both parents, especially Charlotte, include the role of "catechist" in their job description as a religious parent, and second, how automatically they arrived at this perception. Because they are so interested in their children turning out a certain way, one does not find them having to receive a self-imposed kick in the rear before they think about communicating their faith.

Charlotte has done a thorough job: there are daily bedtime prayers done by mom and the kids together and regular family time at the computer to watch "Holy Heroes," a program of CDs and movies about the saints and liturgical seasons. These videos go along with seasonally appropriate Bible passages for the entire family to discuss. The program also provides workbook pages and Mass guides for her children to fill out during the liturgy so they can pay more attention to the readings. Her kids "love" these activities; it's a "really fun thing" they enjoy doing together. Charlotte keeps an Advent calendar which she tracks with her children day by day leading up to Christmas; on Christmas Day, however, her children each receive only three presents, because that's how many Jesus got from the wise men. During Lent the whole family trudges through the days of fasting and abstinence, which, despite the burden of keeping the discipline, seems to be a cherished family tradition. Ever the opinionated one and an advocate for a simpler, less commercialized, Christian lifestyle, Alex observes: "Uh you know for my taste, we do a whole lot more of the Santa and Elf on the Shelf and Easter Bunny crap that somewhat takes away from the religious aspect of the holidays, but I guess I'm kinda a Scrooge in that way." Still, "We do try to bring it back to the actual meaning of the holidays."

The Fourth Component: Enacted Interpretation of Family's Religious Commitments

Though we have often spoken of the process of transmission as a "project" of "building" a Catholic culture, eventually these metaphors fail. Effective transmission requires more than simply piling more and more religious content in children's lives. That is because successful religious transmission is an act of parental *self-communication*, a sharing of something precious, a constitutive element of a parent's sense of self. What parents say, do, and decide religiously must, over the long run, transparently communicate their most precious religious convictions and values, such that by emerging adulthood, children no longer see Catholicism merely as an abstract ideology or set of beliefs that can be critically accepted or rejected, but as something more intimate than that. Children must see the faith as something which mattered intensely to mom or dad, which animated the love and care that went into their parenting, and therefore into a child's entire way of encountering the world. Parents must make efforts to enable their children to interpret what they are all about.

Perhaps we could sum this up by saying that parents who wish to transmit their faith must assume the role of religious mentors, treating their children as apprentices in faith, especially as they enter adolescence. As with any good mentor, parents have a duty to communication and transparency: their lives must clearly stand for something, and that something must be discussed, shared, and bolstered through questioning and trials in order to prove its worth. Such religious mentorship, whether it is exercised well or poorly, creates a sphere of religious influence outside of which children generally do not venture in order to find themselves as adults. The children of the most successful parents we interviewed would find it difficult to achieve the critical distance necessary to reject their faith, since acquiring such a perspective would mean establishing an impersonal, critical distance from the most beloved figures of their lives: their parents. Once a young person has identified his parent as an authentic and trustworthy religious mentor, it seems unlikely

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that he would ever feel the need to outright reject or substantially depart from the faith that anchored and animated his mom or dad's approach to leading a worthwhile life. After all, formative encounters with mentors typically become a constitutive element of our adult identities and worldviews.

Parents, then, must render their faith available to their children—must speak, relate, and deal with them religiously in such a way that children are able to understand and appropriate for themselves the faith that is so important to their family. Parents must adopt an attitude of listening to their children, attentive to their needs, experiences, and developmental capabilities, so as to prove effective when they speak to them. Just as in any conversation, parents must at this point cede full control over what their children are thinking and deciding religiously, while at the same time remaining unafraid to communicate what they wish to share. Achieving such effective interpretation requires that there emerge discrete events, regular occasions, or extended processes by which children are not merely exposed to religious content, but perceive religion's significance to their parent's life, to family life, and to their own orientation to the world.

The occasions in which the religious "light turns on" for children include the religious processing of unpredictable events of trauma or sadness, such as divorce or a sudden death in the family. At these times, a mutual emotional vulnerability and frankness about faith can bind parents and children together. We spoke with one family in which two children returned from alcoholism and deep individual struggles to the practice of their faith after coming to appreciate the same spiritual authors and books which mom and dad had long discussed with them at the dinner table, and whose tapes they had listened to in the car (much to their chagrin at the time). Alternately, a parent's profound conversion or unexpected deepening of faith can provide similar occasions for mutuality and witness. However, less dramatic and more regular practices such as

intimate one-on-one time between parent and child, or substantive religious dinnertime conversation can perform a similar function.

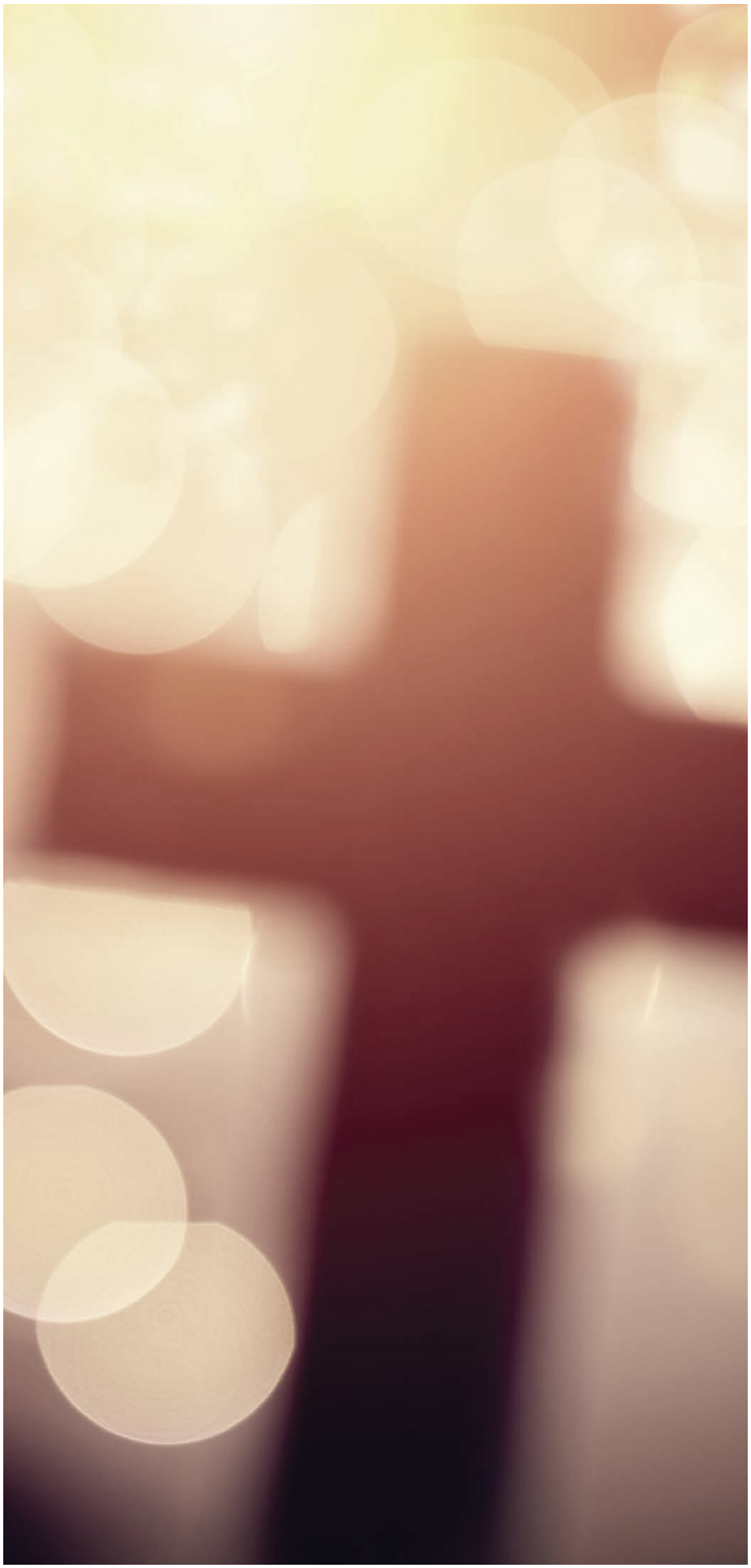
Perhaps the one phenomenon which joins together all these meaning-rich events is *conversation*. Parents described sharing all manner of religious chatter with their children, talk which in almost every instance seemed to carry beneficial effects: pleasant sharing of thoughts about the homily while out to eat after Sunday Mass, parents' willingness to open up about their own religious past or to speak about the family's religious identity and its underlying reasons, answering questions about a strange Bible story that a young child had read in religion class, listening and defending religion during discussions of thorny social issues with questioning teenagers, and even repeating eye-roll-inducing slogans *ad nauseam* to fend off children's whininess about having to get out of bed and go to church. When combined with the provision of layers of rich Catholic content to children, honest and frank talking about the faith, whether in emotionally charged circumstances or as a habitual manner of course, may be the single most important thing parents can do to prime their children for the "Aha!" moments of coming to belief.

SHERRY

A Model of Accompaniment and Transparency

We could summarize Sherry's religious parenting by describing her as a communicator: she wishes to *render transparent* her deepest convictions about what is important in life by means of her decisions and her conversation, by the practices into which she initiates her children and the relationships and experiences outside the home to which she exposes them. It is this effort that generates the particular culture of her home. Her Catholic faith is the foundation of the household; at the same time, she doesn't speak of it only as "her own," but as a familial good held in common. This is evidenced by her willingness to accompany the formation of her children in the Catholic faith in ways appropriate to their age and level of understanding. Sherry told us that she always endeavored to make her religious instruction of her children "fun." Consider the following account she gives of one of her most cherished autumnal traditions when she was a catechist at VBS:

We did the story of the pumpkin even since—when they were little… When we used to do it together another teacher would read the story of the pumpkin and how it had all the sin in it. And then you know you put the light of Christ in it, so we had to get rid of the guck. You know you had to get rid of all these things. I could carve a pumpkin in under a minute. You know scoop it out. [Interviewer laughs] Goo! You know so. And I think they grew up seeing



me work through faith. You know, being involved and doing that. I want to say that I was probably…one of their biggest influences…we always tried to make it fun. 'Cause Catholic faith is heavy. You know we don't wash it down. You know it is what it is. He was crucified, there's blood, you know, 'cause that's what our faith is…But…we always made it fun because they're kids.

This passage reveals many crucial dynamics in her religious parenting: a commitment to Catholic formation but not to forceful imposition; an unabashed embrace of talking genuinely and enthusiastically in religious terms; a loving mentorship that renders the faith that lies at the root of her identity more and more transparent to her children as they grow older.

Sherry is unusually aware that what she is imparting to her children in her religious parenting is not a reified set of beliefs and rituals but the anchor of her own life which she has gained through

practices, experiences, and struggles. Sherry transmits this wisdom in order to provide a guidepost with which her children can navigate their own lives. This is illustrated in her willingness to serve as both *exemplar* of her family's religious commitments and practices and as *expositor*. That is, she both models faith and, just as important, *talks to her children* about why the family does what it does religiously. Sherry explains why she believes her children have taken to volunteering at the parish:

Because in all my years of volunteering, I was always like the first one there and the last one to leave. I wouldn't leave somebody who was having an event or doing something. 'Cause I know what it's like to be left, and you're there twice as long because no one's helping you… 'Cause my son asked, 'why are we always the last ones to leave?' 'Cause we always leave it better than we find it.' You know so…that's what I've taught them, so for them wanting to go back and help and do those things, tells me I know I did something right.

Further, Sherry's habit of transparent communication has undoubtedly been exercised in the way she and her children have endured suffering, loss, and heartbreak in the untimely death of Sherry's mother and in the pain of divorce. Though it is uncertain how much the family has explicitly processed these difficult events in religious terms, there are indications that her children have been able to perceive in their mother's ordeals, accustomed as they are to her basic ideas about life, her commitments and values. They have seen how their mother's faith has been tested, and how this faith helped her to surmount these obstacles. Because the lanes of communication have always been open between Sherry and her children regarding the deeper things of life, her children are empowered to read her life clearly. Thus they are also oriented and strengthened by the faith which she has shared with them, now available to them in their own journeys into adulthood.

So will Sherry's children remain Catholic as adults? It is too early to know for sure. Sherry is convinced that her middle and youngest children are strong in the faith, and we are inclined to believe her. These two children have more sensitive personalities that seem to render them naturally sympathetic to religion; her son wears a "promise of faith" ring every day, and her daughter nags her about how they have not attended church regularly since the divorce. Sherry is less sure about her oldest son, a "cynic" by disposition. With him, she fears the influence of her ex-husband: "I remember reading a statistic where it showed more religious families if the father was relevant, you know, in their faith. In which [my ex-husband] was not…And I think that [my son] thinks sometimes it's hypocritical. 'Cause he's a cynic like his dad." However, this same son recently asked her whether,

given all the logistical messiness that comes with divorce, the family would still be able to attend the Easter Vigil like they always had before. She assured him that she would work with their dad to make it happen: "That [Mass] is beautiful… It's one of our favorites... I don't know if it's tradition so much or their faith, I'm hoping it's a little of both, but they know where they're supposed to be at that time." When asked whether she would have a problem with her son becoming a "Christmas and Easter" Catholic, she answered, unfazed: "As long as he knows where home is and the door is always open, that no matter what he can come home, I think he'll be okay."

SIMONA & MANUEL

Witnessing a Conversion from Dad's Heart

Because Simona and Manuel's daughters, ages twelve, seven, and five, are still relatively young, they have not yet fully encountered the many complexities of adolescence. No doubt there are struggles and growth opportunities ahead; however, to this point, the couple has succeeded in constructing a shared life in which their fervent intention to transmit their faith has become accessible to their children through practices, conversation, and policies in the home. Though Simona and Manuel would not be considered extremely religiously literate—they do not study apologetics or the Catechism, they depend on Fr. Barry's ability to properly interpret the Bible, and they report not always feeling sure of themselves when answering their children's questions about the faith—they nevertheless have been able to communicate a general template for living, with religion playing a central role. Their eldest daughter was old enough to perceive the change in her father that followed upon his renewed religious commitment and to note the correspondence of this event with the family's returning to church. Further, it seems that their children are disposed to imitate the volunteerism of their father, as Gabriela has developed a sense of pride and personal accountability in her duties as altar server. Additionally, the children have received from Fr. Barry and from unexpected sources, such as the parish liturgy coordinator, examples of other adults modeling the faith and desiring to be involved, both religiously and otherwise, in their lives.

We might now provide just two related examples of how Simona and Manuel enact policies and have developed a habitual mode of chatter that reveal their heartfelt intention to transmit their faith. First, both parents related, independently of the other, a common slogan that is heard in the house on Sundays: "You can make one hour of time for God." Once, after her daughter learned at school about how much Jesus suffered on Good Friday, she came home crying to her mother. Simona recalls herself responding: "'See,

that's why you need to, he sacrificed for us. So you have to sacrifice at least once [a week], an hour.' 'Cause she doesn't always wanna go to church." And again: "You have to give [God] time because he's the one that, that, you know, it's because of him that my husband probably got a job, you know, with his help." Manuel's version goes like this: "And we tell her, listen, 'God is very important. You have everything that you have because of God. One hour of your life is not gonna take away from you.' She ends up doing it, but I can see now, she understands what it means. I believe she does. And she understands that that's the right thing to do." Simona confirms Manuel's intuition: "She understands. She doesn't complain as much, she understands."

This explains why Manuel recently grounded Gabriela for a whole month because she showed up half an hour late to Sunday Mass. In the weeks previous to the incident, she had been angling for a babysitting job. Her parents warned her that taking on this job involved a responsibility to communicate about her whereabouts and keep up with vital family commitments, which clearly included Mass, even if this was not made explicit. Simona describes the blowup this way:

Last weekend she had a sleepover at a friend's house. And she knows that every Sunday, she says she's responsible…So, it was Sunday the next day, and we're like, Gabriela knows that we are going to church, so let's see how responsible she is and [whether she] says, "Take me home, [my family] has to go to church on Sunday." So, 6:30 she never came home. They dropped her off at the Mass, in the middle of the Mass. And Manuel was like, "You know that you go one, just one hour a week, give to God. To come to church. And you couldn't come? You couldn't?" And she was like, "I felt bad, we were having fun and I didn't want to tell them you need to take me home 'cause I felt that they wouldn't want me to leave!" and she didn't want to tell them anything, and so he grounded her for a month!

Simona chuckled a bit when telling of Gabriela's rather severe punishment; she thinks her husband went a bit overboard: "A week would've been enough!" However, what is most significant about the story is the way in which the family's espoused values, religious habits of talk, and concrete policies of discipline all stood in alignment. The message Gabriela received from the incident was unmistakable: she knows that keeping up with religious obligations is centrally important for her father and for the family; that going to Mass is a communally significant practice for the household; and that this practice is not something that her parents treat with merely superficial seriousness.

So far, Manuel and Simona's daughters inhabit a religious world that makes sense, in

which they feel surrounded by caring adults and are thoroughly at home. This is exactly the way in which their parents have experienced the Catholic faith as adults. At their young ages, the girls are unanimously well-disposed toward the faith of their parents. How do they feel about going to Mass? Manuel: "Sometimes my youngest doesn't want to go, and my middle: 'I'm tired!' But never like: 'I do *not* want to go!'" Of her eldest, Simona says, with a laugh: "She always asks me, 'How do you know God exists?' I say, 'I just know, and I have faith that he exists and he's there…' And she accepts it so quick. She's a little soul."

The question that remains to be answered, however, is whether Manuel and Simona will continue to communicate effectively about their faith as their children move into adolescence; whether their transmission of faith will migrate from being more a matter of policies and practices into being a foundational piece of their relationships with their children. We saw that Sherry has fully communicated her faith and approach to life to her children as a roadmap to navigating their own lives. Simona and Manuel are on the right track, and we can't help but wonder: will their daughters come to realize the magnitude of their father's past struggle with drinking and see his dramatic opening to faith for what it was? Perhaps their mother, with her lighter, gentler and more tender personality, will assist in this communication? Will they realize that their parents, who love them so much, lead lives that are to a great degree *constituted* by their Catholic faith and that the happy home they enjoy as children owes much to their Catholic upbringing and education? Because their parents'—and especially Manuel's—faith is so strong, because they are surrounded by Catholic role models, practices, and other formative influences, Simona and Manuel's daughters are in a position to grow into faithfully practicing Catholics. The task, however, is not yet complete.

CHARLOTTE & ALEX

Thick Transmission without Coercion

We have seen how intentional Alex and Charlotte are regarding the transmission of their Catholic faith. Nevertheless, Alex was insistent to articulate a value he picked up during his years ministering to Vancouver's homeless teenagers, a value which could at first seem to contradict all the religious content that his children receive in his home: namely, the value of independence and non-coercion in his children's development and their eventual religious choices. When asked whether he would be disappointed or see himself as a "failure" if his children eventually opted against Catholicism, he found it difficult to answer the question. Eventually he settled on the following response:

I can't be disappointed in it. There's no—a child is not an outcome. Right? There's no outcomes in this life. That's somebody's life. I'm not an outcome to my parents. You can't look at it like that. You cannot start thinking about your child, your children as extensions of your own parenting ability or you creating these little personalities you didn't ask [for], [which were] created [by God]; you had sex and there's two chromosomes joined and outside of that, they're, they're an independent person, right?... They're going to thrive based on what is within them and their own relationship with God, I mean. You can help, you can provide a proper framework and give them a safe space to do that in, but I…think that's a mistake, I mean you know everyone's different…I think that has a lot of angst… for example, my brother, his son, my nephew…has Down syndrome. And he can go on and on about all the things [he] will not do in his life. But that's where you go if…you're caught up in outcomes. You're not focusing on the present moment.

As we talked to Alex, it was clear that his resolution not to tether his sense of success as a parent to whether his children turned out to be Catholic was not the expression of indifference towards their formation. Rather, it expressed his awareness that the entirety of his religious parenting was less a "project" tied to a specific "outcome" than a protracted, intentional act of communication of his faith, performed in hopes of finding a listening ear in his children. In other words, whether his children ultimately turned out to be Catholic was up to God; the provision of strong religious mentorship, however, was his job. Alex's sole aspiration was to have communicated his faith fully, genuinely and intentionally. He knew how important his mentoring role was. When asked how he would feel if his children were to stray from the faith, he replied:

You know you want them to [stay with their faith]…[but] maybe it's not particularly important to them, maybe they don't go to church all the time, but at the same time, it's like [dang], if they really hate it, what about it made them hate it? Hope nothing that I did. You know what I mean?... I might think "what did I do wrong? How did I expose them to this organization that led them to have such a bad taste in their mouth?... Why did they not get good things out of it but instead got bad things out of it?"

Thus in Alex and Charlotte's account of religious parenting, we discovered not only a sense of responsibility for the provision of religious content, but an understanding of religion's transmission as domestic mentorship.

This may help to explain why, as far as we could tell, Charlotte and Alex's four children have taken so positively to the Catholic faith. Their children "enjoy" religion class and weekly Mass, they "like" all their priests, especially Fr. Barry, and they "love" their Holy Heroes computer curriculum that mom teaches to them

at home. At church, all of their children love to sing: "They like looking at the board up there, they're like 'Oh, song 238!' and they find it and they're waiting." As Charlotte puts it, her job is to warm her children to her faith, to render it more familiar and enjoyable, "to make it seem not so scary," but rather "happy, friendly, commun[al], approachable"—all the qualities of Catholicism which she discovered in her religious life as a college student, in her experience of postgraduate service, and in her present parish community. Her children's experience of Christmas and Easter is saturated with religious meaning, even if there is a bit too much "Elf on the Shelf" and "Easter Bunny crap" for Alex's liking. If their children were to put a "face" on Catholicism, they might envisage their mother seated at the computer, sharing Catholic YouTube videos with them; or their father, perhaps engrossed in lively conversation with Fr. Barry, or else sitting with his arm around them in the pew, pointing out all the interesting things that are heard and seen at Mass. Alex and Charlotte present a united religious front to their children, and it is clear that many chummy moments of conversation within the family have included religion. When asked if she felt competent enough in the sphere of religion to speak to her children about it, Charlotte replies:

I think so…as much as I understand it…I feel confident speaking about my experiences or what I've read or what I believe. And if I don't know, [I say,] "Ask somebody!" My husband's very knowledgeable about the Bible and like old doctrines and saints and things like that so we sometimes talk about that. But I feel pretty confident and comfortable speaking with them about it. [We're] kind of a good team. Like "I don't know, go ask Daddy.'" [Laughs]

Neither Charlotte nor Alex seem to consider their children to be any kind of religious prodigies—according to Alex, religion is just "one more thing that they do"—however, there are no signs, beyond an occasional wariness about having to get out of bed and go to church, that their children fail to appreciate religion or apprehend its central significance to their parents and the life of their home. Though the children are still young, ranging from nine to three, Alex and Charlotte's intentional religious modeling and teaching have demonstrated that religion is definitively *not* just one more thing that the family does on top of their other activities and pursuits. Any departure from Catholicism on their part would require "swimming upstream" against their parents' strong Catholic influence.

Types of Failed Faith Transmission

To fill out the picture presented above, what follows briefly considers what is often involved in the failure to transmit Catholic faith. We found that there were a few basic groups of parents who had failed or were in the process of failing in their efforts to pass on the faith due to the absence of a sufficiently rich Catholic culture in their home. We observed that nearly all failed efforts at transmission demonstrated characteristics of at least one of these basic types:

1

Erosion from within: The well-meaning but half-hearted parent

When prompted, nearly every Catholic parent that we interviewed expressed the preference that their children grow up Catholic and communicated some level of commitment to ensuring that it happened. However, we also found that many parents who desired to transmit Catholicism were themselves not deeply committed to or convinced of their faith. The inevitable result was internal subversion or gaps in the consistency of the family's embrace of religion, much in the same way that norms of discipline and expectations of moral behavior in the home can be undermined by poor modeling or inconsistent reinforcement. Examples of such gaps included: a family's opting for a Sunday morning soccer tournament over Mass; a lackadaisical parent's consistent lack of enthusiasm regarding religion and habitual deferral to the more fervent parent; and a reticence to reflect upon and explicitly communicate to children why exactly Catholicism mattered to the family. Even very slight inconsistencies or inauthenticities in a parent's conviction that Catholicism is true, necessary, and indispensable to family life can undercut children's perception of the viability of Catholicism as a worthwhile commitment. It became clear that many parents did not possess the profound religious conviction necessary for consistently and effectively building a religious culture in the home.

Essentially, there can be no "faking" the interior conviction necessary to construct a culture amenable to religious transmission. Those parents who earnestly intended transmission but who lacked a deeply held faith simply did not possess a capacity for the task. This is because the faith and spirituality of parents are the central reference points of the religious perceptions

of children who live in their home. Parents who defer to congregations, clergy and programming to provide knowledge and model authenticity which they themselves lack have often already subverted their own intentions. And even though nearly every parent we interviewed explicitly identified himself or herself as being centrally responsible for the transmission of Catholicism to their children, not all of them understood just how responsible they needed to be and *what degree and priority of practical commitment* that responsibility entailed. Only a parent who deeply embraces Catholicism can generate the environs which replicate such a faith in their children.

This means that one strategy parents tried to use for religious transmission is problematic: namely, the strategy of "exposing children to Catholicism" and then retreating from intentional modeling and transmission when the children reach adolescence so that the latter can "choose for themselves what they believe." Parents frequently formulated this notion by saying "I can't force my religion upon my kids." Parents experiencing relative success in transmission tended not to revert to such slogans, clothed as they often were by a sense of exasperation and disempowerment. Rather, successful parents typically spoke of an ongoing effort to model, talk about, and transmit their faith even as their children passed through adolescence and into emerging adulthood, though of course their methods had to be adjusted in a manner appropriate to their children's level of maturity. While nearly every parent acknowledged that eventually children would have to embrace their faith for themselves independently of their parents' wishes, those who were successful tended not to believe that such independence required that parents themselves cease efforts at transmission in order to "allow" a more autonomous choice, or that such efforts somehow represented a "forcing" of religion on their children.

For the sake of illustration, let us consider Barbara, a suburban mother of three boys, ages 12, 14, and 16. She is in her late 40s, was raised in a Catholic home, and attended Catholic schools all the way from kindergarten through her senior year of college. She is in many ways a typical "cradle" Catholic. She says that it is "really important" that her children grow up with the same general beliefs as her, and definitely would prefer if her sons remained Catholic and married Catholic women, even if "she would have to accept it" if they did not. Since Barbara's mother passed away three years ago, the family has regularly visited her graveside and offered prayers at the cemetery, and when a neighbor recently died unexpectedly, Barbara's family canceled a vacation in order to support the grieving family. She reports

that her family "always brings religion into the conversation" in such moments of grief.

At the same time, the family attends Mass only sporadically, almost never in the summer, though more regularly during the school year while CCD is running. Barbara's husband, himself not a Catholic, is more or less religiously indifferent. Logistically speaking, Sunday morning is about the most inconvenient time for the family to gather, between travel sports and summer vacations at the family lake house. Though Barbara wants to hand on the faith she grew up with, she does not seem confident in her expressed reasons for doing so, which are basically that her children grow up to be "good people" and that they have something to fall back on when life grows difficult. She has sent her children to CCD in expectation that they become more compassionate and learn their basic Catholic prayers; it alarms her that kids these days seem not to know them, though she admits that with regard to her own children's ignorance of the faith, "It's not their fault, I mean it's mine." To leave Catholicism would feel "risky," but she lacks a clear conviction of why her household needs to be Catholic. Barbara several times rehearses the tension she feels between guilt at her home's under-commitment to their faith and her fear of "pushing" her faith on her children. She says: "I realize we're not good Catholics, I don't know… You know, we don't follow everything. But I think we follow [Catholicism] enough that my kids know enough about it…Like, I don't want to cram it down their throats." Her sons generally do not appear to find Mass meaningful and at this point the prospect of attending CCD seems to be met with a lack of enthusiasm. Despite her best intentions, she fears that they will eventually drift from the Church.

Barbara does not lack good intentions; nor has she altogether failed to engage her children religiously. But her own conflictedness about making faith a consistently high priority in the home means that she cannot nourish her children's belief and build up the household culture on the basis of a strong faith. This depresses the household's religious vibrancy, undercutting the potential for successful transmission. Contrary to her own professed wish that her children stick with the faith, she finds herself stepping back from the task of intentional transmission as her children grow older; she feels disempowered and resigned to their drifting from the faith. Coming from her mouth, the statement "I don't want to force my faith on them" seems to express not a belief in her children's autonomy, but an exasperated admission that there is little she can do to keep her children Catholic.

2

My faith, your faith, but what about *our* faith?: The devout but individualistic parent

If parents' deeply held faith is a first condition for successful transmission, a second condition concerns the establishment of a cultural medium in the household by which parents' faith becomes accessible to children and available for children's own participation. The presence of the first combined with the absence of the second constitutes the second type of failed parental projects of transmission. As we have reiterated, successful transmission of Catholicism goes hand-in-hand with the building of a household culture. We found that many parents who themselves were highly religiously committed—some of whom even led deep devotional lives and participated regularly in parish activities—nevertheless did not conceive of building a religious culture in the household as an integral aspect of their religious obligation. Instead, they understood their religious life mainly in terms of personal devotion or responsibility to the congregation rather than the home. It is likely that such parents either were religiously formed in a different Catholic culture, in which ethnicity, neighborhood or congregation largely "carried" belief, or underwent a religious conversion in adulthood which dramatically engaged them individually but not as a family. Parents in both categories failed to recognize how much the possibility of children's coming to faith hinged upon whether they shared their own faith and centered the household's life on the communication of that faith.

To illustrate the potential disconnect between the faith of a parent and children, let's listen to Camila, a 38-year-old mother of three: two teenagers (a daughter and a son) and a newborn infant. Up until now, Camila has lived a hard life. Both her biological father and step-father were alcoholics and abusive, and her husband recently left her after she became pregnant with their youngest child. She reports growing up in a traditional Catholic household in Mexico, where she customarily went to Church and confession, though in her words she was "Catholic by convention," not "from the heart." She married young, emigrated to the United States, and was frequently afflicted by panic attacks and anxiety. Just three years ago, however, her sufferings drove her to seek tranquility and healing in her parish, which has helped immensely; she now considers herself a "believer from the heart." In addition to Mass, she attends weekly prayer groups and Bible studies, and she prays regularly. As she says, "It's like I am the Lord's spoiled child."

When it comes to her two teenagers, however, she has not caught up to the enormous effort that religious transmission requires. Being so new to her faith and still

wrestling with the difficulties of mental illness, divorce, and a history of abuse, Camila would prefer to read the Bible and pray privately rather than with her children. Her initially steely resolve to convince her children to attend Mass with her is now dwindling. Her son, who identifies as an atheist, frequently asks her: "When I was little you never took us to church, and now you want to take us?" In conversation with her, he echoes the complaint, "*Your* God this and *your* God that!" Because she began her renewed life of faith so late in her parenting, she finds herself unable to translate her conviction of the peace that faith brings into the overarching household structure. However, with her infant daughter, she vows that things will go differently: "Ever since I was pregnant, she grew listening to me pray the rosary, every day, every night." Laughingly, she concludes: "She's already on the right path... I am going to be more prepared to explain [the faith] to her."

Camila is not to be faulted for the religious drift of her two teenagers, but this anecdote about her journey indicates how consistent, intentional and protracted an effort successful transmission requires, conditions which she was simply unable to fulfill given the circumstances of her life. For various reasons, many parents find themselves stuck in the situation of Camila, deeply committed to the Catholic faith as individuals, but producing underwhelming results in their families.

3

The silent majority: nominally Catholic, but religiously indifferent parents

A third type deserves brief mention, though we will not speak at length about it here. This type occurs in the vast number of families in which the parents are nominally Catholic but barely evince an active practice of their faith and feel largely indifferent about the transmission of their religious identity to their children. Quite clearly, this is hardly a recipe for imparting any semblance of faith or religious knowledge to the next generation. According to other recent studies, such parents likely represent a large—perhaps the largest—fraction of Catholic parents in the United States. However, we did not encounter many of these parents in our interviews, since we were not attempting to form a sample of parents who were nationally representative of Catholic religious attitudes. Since we found our interview subjects through parish priests and personnel, even our interviewees of relatively low religious commitment were nevertheless known to parish staff and were likely more interested in transmitting their faith than those who would fit this "religiously indifferent" category. In this report, we are more interested in reporting "best practices" for parents and religious professionals than in delivering gloomy news about the high numbers

of parents who have little interest in transmitting their faith; however, it is important to remember that vast numbers of indifferent Catholic parents exist. They are difficult to reach and even more difficult to influence.

4

Final observation: successful religious transmission is more difficult for the socially and economically disadvantaged

In the last century, the Catholic Church has with increasing clarity articulated the doctrine of a preferential option for the poor, oppressed, and powerless. Such a stance calls for focusing the Church's communal attention upon the needs of those who unjustly lack the resources required to lead a flourishing life. Sadly, we have found that such deprivation is costly to those parents who want to transmit their faith to their children, but are thwarted by domestic abuse and poverty. We have seen that successful transmission requires parents to stop and reflect about the religious directionality of their household, and to draw upon valuable resources of time and money to accomplish their intent. These resources are the conditions of possibility, for example, of enrolling children in Catholic school or enjoying the leisurely experiences of prayer, pilgrimage, and even everyday moments of shared intimacy and conversation.

We spoke to a heartbreaking number of mothers, almost all of whom lived in poor areas, who faced many kinds of nearly insurmountable obstacles to transmitting the faith they cherish to their children. Such obstacles included abusive husbands who undermined their partner's intent to pass on the faith and who wrecked the possibility of creating a loving household congenial to transmission; the hectic and exhausting circumstances of single parenthood, in which just providing for the family's basic needs prevented parents from being able to reflect on and make decisions about the family's religiosity; and the necessity for parents of using their emotional and psychological resources to deal with their individual trauma and mental illness, leaving scant resources for the building of a domestic religious life to be shared with their children. It is not that transmission is impossible for these populations; we have in rare cases seen it succeed. However, it is no coincidence that the successful families we profiled at length in this report included mothers who largely stayed at home. The presence of a stay-at-home parent is not an absolute condition for successful transmission, but the demonstrative success of such families is suggestive of what kind of *investment of thought, time, and intimacy* is necessary for successful transmission. Those who are prevented by hard circumstances from making these investments are heavily impaired in their chances of handing on their faith.



And even though nearly every parent we interviewed explicitly identified himself or herself as being centrally responsible for the transmission of Catholicism to their children, not all of them understood just how responsible they needed to be and what degree and priority of practical commitment that responsibility entailed.

PART THREE

Key Takeaways

1

Parents should be informed of their role and empowered, not intimidated

Parents need to be told just how significant they are to their children's embrace of religious belief. Nevertheless, they need not possess the same competencies that Catholic institutional actors have traditionally been expected to have, such as academic theological education, professional experience in ministry, or a thick apologetic body armor to fend off children's doubts or questions regarding the faith. The role of parents is based not on such competencies, but on something simpler and more radical: they are their children's most intimate companions, their most familiar role models, and as a result, their most powerful formators. It is an old cliché that "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree"; what is new, however, is how much the statement applies to children's religiosity. Whereas the intergenerational carriers of Catholicism once existed to a large degree outside the home, in neighborhoods, ethnic groups, and schools plugged into the institutional Catholic Church—a Church generally and unreflectively perceived to be credible—the work of cultural transmission is now being done in the home. Whether religious worldviews are credible in the minds of youth is now primarily a function of whether parents render them such to their children. Without either parents or

KEY TAKEAWAY 1

Parents should be informed of their role and empowered, not intimidated

KEY TAKEAWAY 2

Parishes, clergy, and religious professionals are as necessary as ever

KEY TAKEAWAY 3

Cultural opportunities need to be available for the enhancement of Catholic family life

children fully realizing it, children slowly piece together an evaluation of religion's credibility based on the data available to them. When considering the religiousness of their parents, children seem semi-consciously to ask whether Catholicism can clear certain hurdles of credibility: Does my parents' faith make them demonstrably better and more loving to me? Are my parents conflicted, embarrassed, or lukewarm about the faith they at times profess? Does religion actually matter to our family, or is it handed on out of mere obligation or guilt?

Can this faith actually be lived in the world more broadly? Or is it the last gasp of a cultural phenomenon that feels like an arbitrary imposition and is nowhere meaningfully witnessed? It is rare for emerging adults to appropriate Catholicism deeply for themselves despite the ineffective formation provided by parents. Parents must therefore realize how potent they are as role models, and respond not by seeking to become theological experts, but by building a common life in which religion is a guiding light and represents a parent's own gift of self. As Alex put it: "I'm her dad! I'm a force of nature to her!"

What this means is that parents with genuine faith and a deep desire to transmit it already possess the single most indispensable resource needed for successful religious transmission. Such parents should feel empowered, rather than intimidated, by their role. Further, parents like this frequently possess additional cultural assets that they can deploy in the religious formation of their children. For example, close relationships with highly religious grandparents

or family friends provide an opportunity for cross-generational conversation about the faith and can imbue children with a sense of the vast religious world that is their heritage. There may be practices and forms of prayer which have assisted parents in embracing the faith, and these should not be held privately, but rather ought to be introduced into family life. Additionally, the institutional Church, both in its universal and local forms, has its own wealth of liturgical and communal traditions, replete with profound symbolism, rich imagery, and dramatic enactments of Catholic belief. It is necessary that parents take stock of what cultural assets—that is, relationships, practices, experiential opportunities, and so forth—are available to them, which ones they would earnestly desire to share with their children, and how they can find the time and energy to do so. The religious richness of the household environment and the conversations that follow upon exposure to such cultural opportunities do not depend upon academic knowledge of the faith, but upon parents' willingness to articulate and share that which is precious to them. Before children need catechism or theology, they require witness. Parents fulfill their role as witnesses by sharing the faith that they love. They must realize that their sense of competence and suitability for the task of transmission derives from this quality of witness rather than from any kind of professional expertise.

By way of summary, it might be helpful to provide an analogy borrowed from the Catholic spiritual tradition for how parents should think of their task. In the Ignatian model of discernment, a person embarks upon the discipline of listening to her heart, consciously investigating and uncovering crucial memories of experiences, practices, or activities in which she knew that she was particularly near both to herself and to God. Subsequently, within the context of prayer and community, she comes to a resolution about her future course of action by taking her past and her present as clues to how she will undergo spiritual growth in the future. Importantly, the person is not asked to conform to any standard ideal of the "perfect Catholic," nor is theological sophistication necessary. Instead, the process of accepting a future task rests upon the realization of who one truly is and always has been before God. In similar fashion, parents, who are responsible for providing the family with its basic religious direction, must reflect upon the past and present wellsprings of their own religious convictions, sources of ongoing inspiration and joy that provide the basic structure of the family's direction of growth. In this process, parents have to strike a balance, being willing both to hand on what is uniquely theirs and to allow space for children to grow into themselves. Each of the three households we profiled have

found this balance, and Alex and Charlotte consciously espouse it as a value in their parenting. Therefore, just as in Ignatian discernment, parents must intentionally investigate what ways and through what means they are specially fitted to hand on their Catholic faith. However, as it regards transmission, parents do not perform such discernment primarily as individuals but as the administrative leaders of the family community. They must translate their understanding of the faith into practices, habits of talk, and a household atmosphere that communicates their religiously informed worldview to their children and helps them to appropriate it for themselves.

2

Parishes, clergy, and religious professionals are as necessary as ever

Again, even if effective parents are the condition of possibility for Catholicism to take hold with millennials and post-millennials, Catholic families *must still draw upon resources outside the household* if they are to have any chances of success. It is unimaginable that parents could transmit a religious worldview without exposing their children to outside persons, communities, and experiences which constitute the cultural "world" in which Catholic belief makes sense. We have seen how much Sherry treasured her mother, the various priests that had passed through her parish, and other parish personnel who had accompanied her children during different seasons of their lives. Without the intervention of Fr. Barry in Manuel's life and his ongoing engagement with Manuel's family, both he and Simona would likely be presiding over the typical American religious household adrift, only halfhearted about transmission. *With* Fr. Barry's influence, however, Manuel now considers weekly Sunday Mass to represent a symbolic liturgy of his deepest commitments to faith and to family, commitments which are daily reinforced by a strong Catholic education and his consistently religiously present and faithful wife. Similarly, Fr. Barry has been a magnetic force that has pulled Charlotte and Alex close to the parish whose benefits they now enjoy, just like their co-parishioners Manuel and Simona.

We also witnessed several instances of adults outside the home who served as very significant, even central, religious mentors to adolescent children. One family's teenage son seemed intent upon entering the seminary, largely due to the influence of a newly ordained priest who served as his high school's chaplain and campus minister. Many who are reading this report likely are familiar with all kinds of youth ministers, high school theology teachers, college professors, and so forth who have adopted the religious mentorship of young people with tremendous outcomes.

Very often, such actors possess a pastoral, spiritual, or theological expertise that parents do not have and should not be expected to have. Though we believe that children who embrace such mentoring relationships have generally been primed for that encounter by the religious atmosphere created by their parents, the fact remains that such extra-domestic mentors are as necessary as ever in bringing children to full maturity within the milieu of the Church.

3

Cultural opportunities need to be available for the enhancement of Catholic family life

The increasing drift of native Catholics away from the Church over the past several decades has frequently been attributed to weakness in catechesis, the substitution of intellectually facile content for solid philosophy and theology, and a general trend away from instruction in doctrine to subjectivistic modes of reflection. Yet there is another lack that afflicts the formation of Catholic youth, one that is perhaps even more critical, but which has not received attention proportionate to its importance: namely, the lack of meaningful practices, experiences, and opportunities which initiate youth into the Catholic worldview. The disciplines of catechesis and theology, which focus on explicit language articulating and clarifying the faith, will feel alien to children if they are not laid atop a pre-existing foundation of cultural familiarity that accustoms children to Catholicism.

It would be more precise to say that the problem seems to be *not* a lack of such cultural forms of initiation—Catholic tradition is replete with them—but rather a collective amnesia with regard to them. If they are not forgotten altogether, they are disembedded from the theological, communal, and cultural instincts undergirding them, which causes them to appear rote and empty. For example, the practice of praying the rosary is undergirded by an entire notion of imagination and meditation, and the Catholic liturgy of the hours by monastic understandings of prayer, work, and time, though Catholic laity are generally ignorant of the cultural springs that bubbled forth into the development of such practices. To cite another example, the fact that the category of "vacation" monopolizes our cultural sense of travel, at the expense of a religious notion such as pilgrimage—which almost always proves religiously powerful for a family, according to those parents who had tried it—is an instance of our collective amnesia with regard to traditional ways in which the Catholic cultural instinct has been formed.

However, small but potent fragments of a Catholic subculture remain, waiting to be vitalized by the embrace of parents. Think of Sherry's love of baking Easter lamb

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cakes, the annual children's Christmas pageant, and the excising of a patch of her sons' baptismal robes to be kept as a handkerchief for their future spouses on their wedding day. Several parents that we interviewed regularly incorporated the Church's social instinct and the works of mercy into their household activity. In doing so, they helped their children see concretely what sort of social relations and practices constitute a faithful Catholic way of life. These are just a few of the myriad possible practices which function to restore Catholic cultural memory and stimulate the imagination.

From the beginning of their journey as agents of transmission, parents must develop a habit of reflection, intentionality, and creativity in the use of such practices. On the side of clergy, theologians, and pastoral professionals, there is a need, as we have said, to apprise parents of their central, culture-building role in the religious household. The Church's pre-Cana program already provides a venue for such communication, while post-matrimonial guidance of parents by religious professionals remains a relatively untried path. Our conception of the task of religious parenting would harmonize well with the idea of a quasi-Ignatian parental retreat, for example. Professionals can also utilize their expertise in initiating parents and families into those practices that help children see the world through Catholic eyes. Additionally, it seems that the Catholic community's provision of opportunities for youth to assume leadership roles in activities such as CCD instruction, altar serving, or campus ministry assists in children's transition from perceiving Catholicism as an inheritance to viewing it as something freely and responsibly embraced. In such cases, the burden of responsibility for the maintenance of family religious commitments can begin to be shared between parents and children.

Conclusion

We have sought in this report to paint a generally optimistic picture of the prospects of success for those Catholic parents who earnestly desire to raise their children Catholic. It is not easy to achieve success in this task; however, if such parents consciously channel their energies toward the task of creating a religious subculture in the home, assuming the roles of religious witness, mentor, and companion to their children, they are setting themselves up for success. "I am the religious formator of my children" should be a primary point of parental self-identity and responsibility. The considerable investment of time, energy, and attention required to fulfill this task explains why so few parents actually take it on, and therefore why so many young Catholics drift from their faith. However, those parents who hold a firm resolve to give of themselves through the medium of their faith should take courage, for they need not worry about equipping themselves with academic expertise or apologetic know-how. We should be encouraged by how ordinary and unassuming the parents were whom we profiled here. They were not religious "superstars," outwardly among the most zealous of their parishes, but they had become deeply habituated to sharing their religious life through practices and conversations in which both they and their children participated. One of the most basic suggestions of our findings is that young adults arrive at a sense of their fundamental identity and worldview not by weighing all possible intellectual arguments for and against a proposed way of life, but rather by roughly adopting the worldview of those mentors who left the deepest impression upon them—and who loved them and cared for them the most. It should come as no surprise, then, that the emergence of the new generation of dedicated young Catholics will rise and fall with the choices of their parents.



"I am the religious formator of my children" should be a primary point of parental self-identity and responsibility.





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