

Holy, Healthy and Happy Families

[From Julianne Stanz]



5 ways to be a stronger family.

1. Be Grateful and Thankful
2. Cultivate Holiness and Prayer
3. Forgive
4. Live a Sacramental Life
5. Love Your Neighbor

6 Ways to Pass On The Faith To Your Children

1. **Teach them the basics.** Your children need to have an understanding of the basics from a young age. Basics such as understanding (as much as they can) the Trinity, the True Presence in the Eucharist, why we have Saints, what the Mass is all about, and the amazing blessing the Bible is to all Christians! Understanding these basic principles is going to help in the future lessons we teach them so they can have a greater understanding of everything later on.

2. **Saturate the home.** Fill your home with prayers, love, Christian virtues, and yes, even statues, pictures, medals, and other reminders of our religious heroes. These things can't just exist at church, they need to be in the home.
3. **Make religion relatable and engaging for children.** Meet them at their own level! Crafts, activities, and songs are great to reach younger children, older children can enjoy more discussions, starting prayer journals, and reading more books.
4. **Make sure they really get good Catholic formation.** This formation should not just come from the school or religious education program, it has to come from you, the parent.
5. **Weave the faith into your Life.** Do not let the faith be like a puzzle piece in your life that could be plucked out and tossed aside. The faith should be so interwoven into your life that if you tried to remove it, you wouldn't even know where to start, and if you succeeded in removing it, the whole masterpiece would be destroyed.
6. **Lead by example.** The whole do-what-I-say-and-not-what-I-do thing? That's not going to cut it! Walk the talk and your children will see and emulate your attitude, actions and behavior.

The "11 Commandments" of Parenting

1. Thou shalt be consistent: Do as you say you will. Children know where they stand when you are consistent, follow through and mean what you say.
2. Thou shalt expect children to contribute (without being paid ☺): Expect children to help at home but don't expect them to do so graciously all the time.
3. Thou shalt encourage regularly and persistently: Remember that you will get a lot more with honey than with vinegar. Encouragement and praise will get children a lot further than criticism and punishment so be your child's best encourager rather than his fiercest critic.
4. Thou shalt put responsibility where it belongs: Treat children and young people as you want them to be. If you want responsible, capable children then treat them as if they are responsible. The best way to develop responsibility is to give it to children.
5. Thou shalt be known that children and young people only see one side of any issue. Thou shalt take everything they say with a large grain of salt. Not that children and young people lie, but they have been known to exaggerate or see facts only from their side. (Remember that there are often 3 sides to a story- yours, theirs and "the truth").

6. Thou shalt show love and affection to your children. Thou shalt say you love each of your children at least once a day. Knowing they are loveable is the basis of self-worth, regardless of their age.
7. Thou shalt catch children and young people behaving well. Pay attention to your children's positive behavior more than their negative behavior. What you focus on expands so if you focus on the positive behavior that is what you generally get.
8. Thou shalt develop independence in children from the earliest possible age. Never regularly do for a child the things he or she can do for him or herself.
9. Thou shalt set limits and boundaries for children and expect that they will push against them. Children and young people need limits and boundaries as they make them feel secure.
10. Thou shalt keep a sense of humor when dealing with children. This will help you keep things in perspective.

The 11th (and most important) commandment: Thou shalt be a good role model for your children. Show rather than tell children and young people how you want them to communicate, behave and live. Children learn what they live and, as parents, your actions speak louder than your words.

Meaningful Holiday Traditions and Fun Family Activities

Looking to volunteer this holiday season as family? Super! Consider doing something to help someone else, perhaps a family evening volunteering at the Homeless Shelter? Habitat for Humanity? These are really important ways to bring your family together. Afterwards share a hot chocolate, reflect upon the experience, give thanks to God and remember in pray those whom you encountered.

Leaves of gratitude

How about a fun seasonal craft idea for making a homemade family gratitude tree? Head out in the backyard with your little ones to find the perfect branch for a tree that will show your appreciation all season. Write down your messages of gratitude to hang from the branches and design the ornaments to your liking. And if you have young children, no worries! Simply let them draw, color or paint what they are grateful for this year.

Christmas treats for furry friends

According to an old Norwegian holiday legend regarding the birth of Jesus Christ, God had granted the animals in the manger a voice to give their praise for the child's miracle birth. Many families put their own spin on this popular legend each Christmas Eve by leaving treats out for the neighborhood wildlife, pets and all of their favorite animal friends to give thanks during a time when food is scarce. This can be as simple as filling up the bird feeder, setting out a salt lick or leaving peanut butter bread on the porch for the squirrels. Some families even hike into the woods to decorate a special tree with edible treats! This can include pine cones rolled in peanut butter, cranberry or popcorn garlands and more.

Celebrate the season of light

In the midst of the darker winter days and the added stress and craziness from the holiday season, observing the winter solstice (December 22) -- the shortest day and longest night of the year -- can provide a much-needed moment to slow down and celebrate the light in our lives. In Ireland, it is a tradition to put a candle in the window to welcome the Holy Family. Other ideas include planning a family candle-lit dinner, stargaze in the backyard or create your own luminaries (or fibrolites) to line your porch, sidewalks or front steps with their lovely glowing light. These decorative paper bags are traditionally filled with sand and a small candle.

Keepin' the Memories Alive

One of our favorite holiday traditions is actually one that we saw being practiced in a friend's home while we were visiting for the holidays. Each Christmas our friend's mother writes down the big family moments that have happened throughout the year and reads them aloud after the family has finished opening their gifts. Now as adults, our friend and his siblings can go back and read these annual thoughtful journal entries and reminisce over all of the great family moments that they may not have remembered right away. And since the journal begins from the time that they were infants, they have plenty of treasured moments to recall each year!

The Wrapped Jesus and other traditions.....

From my friend Mary Beth:

My family has some great traditions on Christmas Eve. We unwrap the baby Jesus figure (from the nativity scene) and place him in the manger. (My mom always wraps it, because Jesus is our first present and God's gift to us). We all kneel down in front of the manger and sing "O Come Let Us Adore Him". Then we all quietly offer Jesus a "Christmas gift"maybe a small sacrifice, mortification, loving act towards someone, or resolution for the future. We also have a birthday cake for Jesus, and sing "Happy Birthday". Lastly we have a toast for Jesus, with non-alcoholic sparkling wine for the kids.

From my friend Krissy:

"We read the Christmas Story together on Christmas Eve and give each kid a part to read. Do a family blessing of the Manger and place the baby Jesus statue in the crib. Write a letter or prayers and place them by the Infant. Go to Mass as a family. With little kids find a manger of their own they can touch and rearrange. Have the Three Kings journey around different spots of the house and arrive to the crib by Epiphany".

Lent:

<http://catholicmom.com/kids/lenten-activities-for-children/> has wonderful activities for you to do with your children. They change out their activities regularly and update to incorporate new ideas.