

FAMILY STORIES AND FAMILY FAITH

The Catholic faith that we pass on to our children is an important part of our heritage. We adults possess this faith because other people passed it on to us. The line of our ancestors in faith stretches thousands of years into the past. But, for almost all of us, this heritage of faith is also very present and alive in the stories of our family. One of the best ways to

build faith in our children is to share our stories with them. Family history includes memories of those who are no longer with us and the living stories of the aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins, nieces and nephews in your child's extended family. In the history of your family, your child will learn some of the most important lessons of faith.



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Strengthening Your Child's Connection to Your Family's History

Reach out to your extended family.

Time pressures and distance can make keeping up with the people in your extended family difficult, but it's worth the effort to make sure your child gets to know his or her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Your own extended family might also include godparents and other close family friends, even though they may not be related by blood. This loving group can be an invaluable resource for children as they awaken to the larger world. In the wisdom and experience of family, children can find answers to the big questions of life: "Is the world a friendly or a scary place?" "What do I stand for?" "What do we believe in?"



Connect across the generations.



Encourage your children to speak with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other older relatives about what their faith means to them. An open-ended

approach usually works best. Your child might ask them what they remember about their First Holy Communion or Confirmation. Did they ever think about becoming a nun or a priest? Do they have a favorite saint? If they were born in another country or grew up with parents who were, what do they remember of special religious customs of their childhood?

Tell the milestone stories.

Talk about the day your child was born. What were you doing when the excitement started? (Children usually love to hear about the rush to the hospital.) What did Grandpa and Grandma say when you called with the news of their birth? Talk about the day of your child's Baptism. How did you choose your child's name? What's the significance of this name? Was he or she named for another family member or a dear family friend?

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When I was a child . . .

Children like to hear their elders talk about the time when they were young (as long as the stories are honest and funny, and not occasions for preaching). They like knowing that their parents and aunts and uncles faced the same insecurities and indignities they face. These stories help them absorb a useful perspective on life: their parents were once young. They themselves will grow up and assume adult responsibilities like the older people in their family.

Don't hide the negative in your family history.

Every family's story has its bleak chapters. Talk about them in a straightforward way when your child is ready to hear about them. God does not want us to hide or deny problems and difficulties, but to embrace them with faith and courage.

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Borrow strength from your relatives.

It's likely that your relatives and ancestors faced challenges very similar to the ones your family faces. They struggled to make a living, raise children, and make a home. They coped with illness and death, unwelcome relocation, separation from loved ones, and financial setbacks. Their faith sustained them. Probe for the stories of this practical faith and share them with your children. Climb the family tree. At the top, you'll get the best view of life.



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The Story of a Family Challenge

Ask your child to solicit a "Favorite Family Story" from a relative. It should be the story of a challenging situation that shows the power of faith. You might suggest a grandparent or aunt or uncle who is close to your child and who has a lively appreciation for the family's story. Have your child sit down and fill out the story sheet below. Then ask your child to make a cover for the story "book" with a drawing that illustrates the story.

My Favorite Family Story

Who told the story? _____

The Story: _____

What was the challenge? _____

How did God help? _____

