**Introduction**

**The Challenge of Raising Catholic Children in a Secular Culture**

In preparing this talk I looked back and examined what produced so many family members that attend daily mass, embrace all of the Church’s teachings and try to live virtuous lives, when raised in the turbulent 60’s and the confused Post Vatican II Catholic Church. Why did they not ‘fall away” as so many of my friends and other relatives had done? My generation had one celibate vocation out of 32 grandchildren and the next generation has 6, 3 of whom are priests. This is NOT mentioned for pats on the back, because God was the principle mover, but merely to try to explain, as best I can what “worked” to bring this result.

 The main points for this talk will be Formation and Love of God. The pressure to conform is so huge in our American culture that one truly needs to be diligent and long suffering, having great resolve and patience if we want to have good Catholic children. To be clear trying to choose the good for us and our children is NOT EASY. Sometimes it is very lonely, for us and for the children. The culture is against us in many ways but God is with us and he said in John 14:23 “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and WE will come to him and make our dwelling with him.” So protecting our children in this culture comes down to one thing, LOVE and keeping ‘LOVE’S’ word, making sure we are all trying to know and love and serve God because that is why he created them and us!! God placed us in this very particular culture and he wants us bring HIS LOVE into it no matter how difficult that seems. He showed us through Jesus, that life isn’t necessarily easy and there will always be the CROSS, thanks to the original sin. As the title of the talk states, it IS a ***challenge*** but with God at our side we can be “loaded for Bear.”

A personal antidote: In the late 80’s, our parish, in another state, was picked by the diocese to have the first sex education program. (Now, 30 years later, you parents, thanks to legalized homosexual unions, have to deal with the transgender policies that now exist in the Fairfax County schools.) Back to the 80’s. My husband and I knew our individual children far better than the handbook for the teachers and found many objections. At the All- parish meeting on the subject, out of all the families there, we were one of only two families that felt it was not protecting the individual child’s sense of modesty. Thankfully we were allowed to have the children opt out. And as it turned out, one child who was sent to a closet like room, with a notebook and pencil began to write poetry for the very first time. That 4th grade child is now a PHD in English Literature, and has just written a poetry book for children and adults. So from suffering comes FRUIT! Yes, all of us had to suffer a bit but the children became tougher and thank God they trusted us as we had discussed so many “sticky” issues at the dinner table in preparation for the out of control culture we saw unfolding around us.

So #1) …..**Formation, formation, formation!** They need to know that you are aware of what they are going through and that you will be open to what they say. Which means being aware, and loving, but still restricting the many electronic avenues into your child’s heart, mind and soul. Not easy, but doing so WORKS! As my grandmother used to say, “The EASIER you are on your children when they are young the HARDER they’re life will be. The HARDER you are on them when they’re young, the EASIER their life will be.”

I want to continue by **encouraging you** to start, no matter the age of your children, by accessing how well you are attending to your children’s complete FORMATION. I can say with confidence that it was the faithful Catholic formation and example from the adults in my life; that of my mother and grandmother, that sealed the deal. I saw that what they believed, even with their many flaws and failings, *influenced* their lives. THEY TRULY LOVED JESUS and they exuded love for all around them. (Mom>May crownings, angelus, statues, flowers- took yrs. to figure out her obsession with Mary until I read the book, Mary of Nazareth in my early 20’s)

Here are few things I believe had an impact:

- Frequent family dinner and discussions

-Open Communications and prompt explanations about morality and church teachings

-Being consistent, unified, and loving disciplinarians

-Using and studying the Catechism

-Family rosaries, visits to the Blessed Sacrament

- Teaching manners (i.e., no one excused without permission or talking with mouth full) and communication skills (i.e., no interrupting. Speak in sentences) at the dinner table

-Taking children to occasional daily Mass in the summer and Sataurdays

- Taking them to confession once a month or more

-Monitoring and restricting their media use: smart phones: texting, tweeting

Facebook, TV, computers, books, movies electronic games)

-Creating a Catholic Culture in the home, a ***culture of love***, from the perspective: they are not called to be of this world AND what will make them happy is SEEKING God and his Will for them.

*Anecdote: 5 yr. old grandson to my eldest daughter, “I want to be a digger man when I grow up.” My daughter to her son, “Great, as long as you are trying to love God, being a good digger man.”*

One last bullet point -Remind them that God loves them so much more than you could possibly love them!!

Some encouraging thoughts:

***We can always make parental changes***, no matter where we find ourselves on the child raising spectrum AND that we ***are not alone in this battle for our children’s souls.*** We have what the church has called the “grace of state” as the parent of the child and receive grace continually from the sacrament of Marriage to aid us in this mission. God gives us these graces because, ***our children are on loan*** ***from God*** and he wants them, like us, with him in Heaven!! He is ultimately IN CHARGE, He IS Our FATHER, He gave them to us and will help us in our awesome life’s mission, which is, **to impart his love to our children.**

 We are all on a journey and have only as much time as God allows us, to try to know, love and serve him. Communicate that daily to your children. (I often asked my children “Why are you here and where are you to go forever?”)

**I have a challenge for you.** Google the previously much maligned Baltimore catechism and read the first six points or so, to see its clear and simple doctrine. Especially question #3. Why did God make us? I also highly recommend that you make the Catechism of the Catholic church a part of your home. It is the greatest gift from St. Pope John Paul II!

Having “everlasting happiness in heaven” (part of question 3’s answer) in your and your child’s frontal lobe is a **tremendous tool** for many of life’s decisions. It reminds them/us where we all want to be for eternity. My mother had a fabulous line that when we complained about a denial or a family rule we abhorred, she would say, “I am doing this **because I want to spend Eternity with you!** So when you are in the battle of the wills over smart phones, modest clothing, bad movies and TV, you MUST prevail because you want them to be a Saint, and because everyone in Heaven is a Saint! Thus it is a truth and fact that all of us want to be Saints because we all want Heaven!

Encourage your children by telling them ***they have a particular vocation chosen just for them by God*** and when they know and fulfill it they will be truly happy. Have them pray daily to know it. It is their path to true freedom and happiness. (Anecdote of J, (after the other 5 siblings were gone and into their vocations) and my forgetting the always rosary intention regarding knowing one’s vocation.)

Now #II) We **parents need to have a real and personal relationship with Jesus Christ in order to help our children face the challenges of this culture.** They are helped immensely by seeing we love God! We need to let our children see that *we follow and LOVE A PERSON*, with an incredible heart and mind, and we just don’t obey rules for rules sake. If they see we *really* love God ***it will have an impact***, if not now, it will later. As St. Francis reportedly said, “Preach Jesus, and if necessary use words.” Let them see you pray, let them see you on your knees at home maybe, if children are smaller, say the Morning Offering and the night prayers with them kneeling.

 People who truly love, make sacrifices for the loved one. That is why this digital age of artificial friends, disconnected communication and instant gratification makes it difficult for parents to teach their children how to form true friendships and self sacrificing, committed love. That is why prayer is so essential for both parents and children and why we must control the digital culture’s impact on all of our lives. Here is a helpful video to see where we are and what we can do to be more personal, more human. It is was meant for the secular workplace but is very pertinent for everyone.<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hER0Qp6QJNU> Simon Sinek

 I close reminding all of us that **LOVE IS THE BEST MOTIVATOR and GRACE is the only thing that changes hearts.** God said, through the Angel Gabriel to Mary, “nothing is impossible with God” so take heart in the words of the Our Father that we have an awesome Father who loves our children madly and wants them with him some day in Paradise.

**Bibliography/References**

The Big Disconnect by Catherine Steiner Adair, (Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age) Note: I have not read this but it was recommended with the caveat that she is a secular Psychologist/Counselor who doesn’t have the full picture and it is apparently very thoughtfully laid out. Lifeline,ISBN978 -0-93393-297-5 by Jim Stenson (The religious Upbringing of your Children)

Catechism of the Catholic Church

From their website, **THE HEAD MASTER OF THE HEIGHTS SCHOOL FOR BOYS:**

“Three Books that Give a Sense of the Negative Culture Surrounding Boys

Please note that these books, based as they are upon the actual experiences of modern youth, contain sometimes graphic accounts of the moral dilemmas faced by our young people.  These are interesting books, but be aware that the authors do not pull punches.”

-- [The Death of the Grown-Up](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0312340494/ref%3Das_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=heigh-20&camp=1789&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=0312340494&linkId=f215b6201da98ed9785319c9c749b267), Diana West:  Where have all the grown-ups gone?  Why have we turned from leading the next generation, to emulating them?

* [The Second Family](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0312284934/ref%3Das_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=heigh-20&camp=1789&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=0312284934&linkId=c1fdb3a1c8dd33dae9b0a30761549163), Ron Taffel:  An account of the power of the peer group.  “My son would never do that!”  No when he’s with you, perhaps, but where are his friends leading him?
* [Escaping the Endless Adolescence](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0345507894/ref%3Das_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=heigh-20&camp=1789&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=0345507894&linkId=68fc1d3f59d6bcc8ebaf4f4dd209d3a1), Joseph Allen and Claudia Worrell Allen:  Why is 26 the new 18?  The Allens argue that maybe this isn’t entirely biological–does our culture (and maybe our own parenting) stunt growth?

Four Must-Reads that Help with Moral Imagination

* [Anna Karenina](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0486437965/ref%3Das_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=heigh-20&camp=1789&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=0486437965&linkId=94d7953872ae8f42883a8cbbfef8a109), Leo Tolstoy:  A great description of men, even though the main protagonist is a woman.
* [Orthodoxy](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1515241394/ref%3Das_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=heigh-20&camp=1789&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=1515241394&linkId=3d42edb96427404d798b818a45bc00de), G.K. Chesterton:  G.K. Chesterton’s intellectual autobiography.  Why believe?

[Screwtape Letters](http://amzn.to/2dgH78O), C.S. Lewis:  Heights seniors have read this book for over a decade.  Screwtape’s insights are frighteningly accurate, though witty and delightful all the while.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hER0Qp6QJNU> Simon Sinek