

Bert Ghezzi is a well-known author on Catholic family life. He and his wife, Mary Lou, still work at handing on the faith to their seven children. The author of "Keeping Your Kids Catholic" (Servant) and most recently of "Voices of the Saints: A Year of Readings" (Doubleday), he currently works as Editorial Director of Servant Publications in Ann Arbor, MI.

The ABC's of raising kids Catholic

by Bert Ghezzi

I am convinced that parents can do a good job of handing on the faith to their kids with a maximum of grace and a minimum of stress. This list sums up a tested strategy for no-guilt Catholic parenting.

Always pray confidently. Expect the Lord to say "yes" to prayers for your family.

Be deliberate. Decide to act, or you won't do anything.

Care for one another. Our love as wives and husbands is the cornerstone of all our parenting.

Discern good and evil. Teach kids to embrace the good in society and to avoid the evil.

Express affection and forgiveness. Families that express love and forgiveness can withstand any problem that life sends.

Form children fully in the Catholic faith. Use all available means and seize every opportunity to introduce kids to Catholic doctrine and practice.

Get help from friends. We have a local Christian community to help us raise our kids Catholic. Participate in it.

Have only a few rules. Only set a few important boundaries to guide kids' behavior. Too many rules may crush them or drive them away.

Introduce children to God in a personal way. Our kids need to meet God as a person who loves them. First, we must get well acquainted with Him ourselves.

Just do a few important things. We only need to do a few significant things consistently. And we can work on them one at a time.

Keep talking with your kids. Talking with kids about the faith is essential. It makes truths explicit and real. And listening to them lets us meet our kids right where they are.

Laugh a lot. Cultivating a sense of humor helps parents survive.

Meet regularly to talk about your family. Couples should regularly discuss family care. Single parents should also talk to someone.

Never compromise on morality. Enforce high moral standards and teach children how to deal with their wrongdoing.

Orient your life on God. Put God first in your family life.

Permit yourself to start over. No one is keeping score of our "failures" except us. So feel free to pick up the pieces and try again.

Quit feeling guilty. A parent's role is only to point the children in the right direction. The Lord gave our kids free wills and wants them to make their own choices.

Reach out to others in service. Involving kids in some kind of service to others is the best way to teach Christian love.

Show and tell kids how to live as Catholics. Our good example is not enough. Our kids need to hear us tell in our own words what the Catholic faith means to us.

Take time for family prayer. Talking with God as a family acknowledges His presence in our home, and it's the way kids learn to pray.

Use the Sacraments as a source of strength. Participating in the Sacraments brings the Holy Spirit into our daily family lives.

Value vocations and encourage them. The Lord may be inviting one of our kids to be a priest, a sister, or a brother -- or to serve Him in some other dedicated way. We should encourage our children to consider such service.

Witness to your experience of God. Help your kids find a personal relationship with God by telling them about your own relationship with Him.

EXplore the truths of the faith. Study the faith not only for your own growth, but to be better prepared to pass on the faith to your children.

Yield to the Holy Spirit. Yielding to the Spirit means doing what we can, but prayerfully depending on the Holy Spirit to produce the right outcome. We parents raise the sails. Then we let the breezes of the Spirit fill them and move things ahead.

Of course, there is no Z because we don't know everything there is to know about raising our kids Catholic. But let's pool our wisdom and help each other do a better job.

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