

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19: 14

Each child is an important person to you as parents and to God. Parenting is a ministry, a service to life. You, as a parent, have the dignity of being the "original and irreplaceable"^[1] person in your child's religious journey.

The family is the primary community in the faith journey of the child, it is the "domestic church," because it is within the life of the family we find the first and privileged place of the Christian community lived. Here, you as parents are "the first heralds of the faith"^[2] Here "faith works through love" and a relationship with God can begin to be nurtured. You, as parents, have shared the gift of human life with your child, and through Baptism, have enriched your child with a share in God's own life. Your faith, your attitude toward others, and your trust in a loving God strongly influences the development of your child's faith.^[3] We offer these suggestions to help you nurture your child's developing relationship with God.

[An Open Letter to the parents of young children from a mother of teens](#)

Praying with Your Child

"If we want to assist the child in his or her religious experience, an important area which we must attend is that of prayer. Prayer is, first of all, listening to God. It is the particular key which opens up the mystery of God's relationship with God's creature; it is a key which belongs to God, but which God gives to all... Prayer is initiation to the mystery of God and is, itself, a mystery... our task is that of creating the conditions for silence and reverence which will help the child focus on and listen to God. We do this, first of all, by preparing an environment with a prayerful atmosphere." Gianna Gobbi, Listening to God with Children, page 117-118

As parents, we find that we pray often and earnestly for our children. We ask God to keep them safe, to make them well, and to help us as we care for them. But there is another gift of prayer that comes to us: the gift of praying with our children. There is a big difference between a child's prayer and that of an adult. It is precisely this difference that makes it such a privilege to pray with little children. They lead us to an enjoyment of God that we may have been missing. When allowed to pray naturally, their simple words come straight from the heart. What is prayer? We have probably been told that prayer is talking to God. But talking is only one of the ways that young children communicate with God. They help us understand a broader and richer notion of prayer: to pray is to listen to God and respond, to receive God's gifts and respond.

^[1] The role of the Christian family in the modern world. No. 53

^[2] LG 11

^[3] NDC E1