

GIFT

GROWING
IN FAITH
TOGETHER

FAMILY
CATECHESIS
IN THE
CATHOLIC
COMMUNITY
OF EXETER



GIFT – Growing In Faith Together

IN THE RITE OF BAPTISM FOR A CHILD the celebrant addresses the parents saying: “You have asked to have your child baptised. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbour. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?” The parents answer confidently: “We do.” This is a big responsibility and we know it is not undertaken lightly. The Church understands the challenge and wants to help.

Parents are the ones who have the most influence on whether their children remain Catholic when they reach adulthood (or while they are still children!). Family catechesis seeks to address the problem of teaching children without, or separately from their parents. It assists parents in their role rather than taking over from them. It forms parents and children in their faith together.

IN THE JOY OF LOVE (*Amoris Laetitia*) Pope Francis encourages this method saying: “Family catechesis is of great assistance as an effective method in training young parents to be aware of their mission as evangelisers of their own family.” (*AT 287*)

Discerning when your child is ready to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist is an important factor in their, and your, journey of faith. “Parents have to discern not only if their children are ready for this step, but if they and their entire family are ready.” (*Fr James Mallon – Divine Renovation*)

The Church also has a role in discerning readiness. Receiving the sacraments is not about reaching a certain age – a rite of passage – but about recognising your child’s, and your family’s understanding of what it is to be part of the Church family and a willingness to participate fully in the Church’s life.

WE WANT FAMILIES TO ENGAGE with their faith. Encouraging you to pray, talk about faith issues, and have more family time together is not enough. We want to provide a place for you to learn what engaging with your faith actually looks like and then to do it!

We will offer monthly sessions – on Saturday mornings – to which you will be invited. We will gather, pray, share and learn about our faith together. Together we will engage in activities and conversations that will help us reflect on what faith means to each of us; children, parents, catechists and clergy. In addition we will offer Zoom sessions each month for parents to introduce you to additional resources for you to use at home as a family.

GIFT is for families with children aged between 5 and 11, whether you are already engaged with your faith and the Church or whether seeking the sacraments for your child is your motivation and you're not yet as engaged as you would like to be.

We want to encourage you to participate in the life of the Church; gathering on a Sunday to worship God in the celebration of Mass, time at home when you pray together as a family, parish activities you take part in, for example: ministry, visiting the sick, reading at Mass etc. These things show your willingness to be full members of the community and a desire for your faith to grow.

When you, and we, feel your child is ready to receive the sacraments we will offer several sessions specifically designed to prepare them. Not everyone will be ready at the same time. This will mean celebrating the reception of the sacraments at different times throughout the year. For instance there will no longer be only one day when everyone comes forward at the same time to receive holy communion for the first time. The dates will be decided between us. Hopefully small groups of children will be ready together so that they can share the celebration with one another, their families and the parish community.

THE CHURCH RECOGNISES that for many parents, and grandparents(!), catechesis ended when they were children. They can lack confidence and be intimidated by what passing on the faith entails. They need help to understand their faith better and to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ. We can't pass on what we don't have! And all families are different. We know that many parents are not both Catholic and this too can be challenging. The Church is here to help.

Just like any relationship, the one with Jesus and his Church needs nurturing and supporting so that we can fully experience the life that was offered us when we were baptised and in turn invite others to experience the same. This is what GIFT is all about.

We are looking forward to supporting you as you grow in faith yourselves and in your role as evangelisers of your family. Details of sessions will be published in the newsletter. If you would like to know more, please contact us, we will be pleased to help.

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Prayer for my family

Lord Jesus, be with my family.

Grant us your peace and harmony, an end to conflict and division.

Gift us with compassion to better understand each other,

wisdom and love to assist each other,

and trust and patience to live peacefully together.

Grant, that through the intercession of your mother Mary

and St Joseph, our family may become a holy family

accepting each other, working together in unity,

selflessly dedicated to one other and to you. Amen.

The parishes of Sacred Heart and Blessed Sacrament Exeter are part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Plymouth.

