

What makes a program "magic"?

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The past year has been a challenge and an opportunity for growth.

It has shaken us to realize and embrace new needs; to refocus on what is important, to evaluate the outcomes we really desire, and to identify how to get there. This time has forced us to be stretched in new ways, from technology to resources, and new methodologies, causing us to take a hard look at the ways we form children and engage their families for what will be effective, and most importantly, how to get them back. So, what is the magic that makes it all work?

It's the people. There is no resource, curriculum, guide, text, or eLearning chapter that is more effective than the people who make it all come alive: The catechetical leader who looks to connect with families, learning of their needs and triumphs to meet and celebrate them through various ministerial efforts, and communicating and enriching their catechetical teams to fulfill the mission; parents who unpack the lessons and nurture the faith at home - not as something compartmentalized, but as a lens through which they view and engage the world; catechists who engage families, providing them with the necessary tools, and who journey with them in forming discipleship in Jesus. Formation in faith is an effort of partnership a parish community shares with parents—not an either/or, but a both/and.

We see effectiveness when we help families feel connected, when they feel they belong and matter to the faith community. If we want to engage families in being formed in the faith, we must—yes, we must—focus on our relationships with them and on the excitement, joy, and vulnerability of being real to walk and share the journey with them.

Pope Francis calls this accompaniment.

Before we can ever evaluate materials, we have a responsibility to evaluate how well we are doing with the pastoral side of things with relationship. **If we want them to hear the message and engage in their faith in God, we must embrace the whole of them, and we can't begin by presenting them a list of expectations.** Instead, how might you embrace their desire to form their children as disciples and engage them in that process, supporting parents in their own journeys to accompany their children in a natural and real-life way? An impactful start is to acknowledge, celebrate, lift up, and bless the ordinariness of family life - those moments of true, simply-lived holiness. To do so, it's necessary to get to know them.

In what ways can you intentionally value relationship with families in practical ways? This is step one. If we want to engage families, we must do so from a holistic standpoint, beginning with relationship and creating community with them. This is how we touch hearts. This is where we meet the Christ in each other. **It's what Jesus did** - let's steep ourselves in the Gospels and in the model for ministry Jesus gave us - and here we are, 2000 years later, living as disciples.

The magic and effectiveness of any program or model for formation in the faith is its people. The texts are a guide to present the faith in all its richness. Christ does not live in a text; the Christ lives and moves and has his being in us. Knowing that it's the people who give the faith life, and in whom the Christ lives, how can we refocus our energies and efforts to strengthen those relationships, then? What steps can we take, as individuals, leaders, and catechetical teams to commit to this effort, right now, as we prepare for an exciting and joyful fall?

The potential outcome will allow the faith to be carried into *millennia.*

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