



Dear Parents,

Jacqueline Kennedy said, “If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do matters very much.” Her words always resonated with me as insight into the primacy of the calling of parenthood. Since children don't come with a “how-to” manual we all bungle things as parents from time to time. Thank goodness they are usually resilient as we learn to become moms and dads! I know you love your children more than anyone in the world and you are the conduit of God's love in their lives.

I am in awe of how beautifully you parents function and love your children even through months of sleepless nights, juggling jobs, school and childcare schedules, endless carpooling, shopping, making, and cleaning up meals and a thousand other unselfish acts of service to your families. No wonder often we have no better analogy of God's love than that of a parent!!

You are so busy, that I suspect you didn't have time to read the most current and comprehensive research on a topic vital to your vocation, *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass on their Religion to the Next Generation* by Dr. Christian Smith, University of Notre Dame.

Can I share some research with you that might affirm your parenting choices and encourage you on the long days and tough nights in one of the most important things in life, your child's faith?

This new national study shows that as parents, **you**, are the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children and teens! This research, as well as a myriad of other studies, confirms that you play the leading role in shaping your child's deepest values and the character of their religious and spiritual life, now and well after they leave home.

In fact, some parents may be surprised to know “the single most powerful causal influence on the religious lives of American teenagers and young adults is the religious lives of their parents. Not their peers, not the media, not their youth group leaders or clergy, and not their religious schoolteachers.” If you are a parent of a teen, you might be saying, “Oh I know I lost most of my influence when they became teens” (and they may act as if that were true). But, in most cases, these cultural illusions are not supported by the facts. Your influence as parents on their religious beliefs, practices and values lasts for decades and in many cases a lifetime.

“...a large body of accumulated research consistently shows that... the influence of parents in religiousness trumps every other influence, however much parents and children assume otherwise.”

I wish this column was ten pages long so I could share more of this fascinating study that explains why this is true. But let me share one insight- *how important it is for parents to talk to their children about matters of faith during the week*. When parents do this, children integrate the meaning of faith into the lived experience of life. “When parents talk naturally and substantially about religion and its place in life, throughout the week it effectively indicates to children that, in the mix of life's many priorities and values, this stuff matters a lot. And that raises the stakes for children's decisions about their own future religious commitments.”

As a grandparent, I look at this from a view on the balcony of the dancefloor of life. For you parents, who are dancing, I hope this gives you encouragement to know how important you are. If I could offer you two things you might consider in your parenting choices, they would be to remember you are the role model of faith and talking with your children about your faith has tremendous value.

Know that we- your Church, school, faith formation, catechists, teachers, pastor- are cheering you on and supporting you in any way we can. You are shining stars of love and faith to your children in the most important job you will ever have!

With love,

Kathie Amidei

