

Serving Today's Families

All of the recent catechetical documents of the Church remind us that families are the first educators of their children in the faith, and that teachers, catechists, and catechetical leaders are to support them in this vital parental responsibility in every way they can. Economic pressures, job pressures, and the hectic schedules of children stress families in ways less known a generation ago. We know this and yet we appear to forget it now and then. We place more and more demands on the parents of our school children and become impatient with them when they do not respond as we wish.

This might seem a strange reflection to make just before you turn the page to find six plans for in-service events that will invite your parents to come out of their homes and add one more thing to their already full schedules. Yet today's parents are in critical need of adult faith formation and skills for sharing faith with their children in effective ways. In response to that need, it is important to offer opportunities for their growth. If you set the right parameters as you plan events, you will have a greater chance of success. Here are a few suggestions:

- 1. Be flexible in your timing.** Offer each workshop in several time slots so families can choose the time that is best for them. In addition to school-night workshops, you might want to consider alternative meeting times, such as after Mass on Sunday with a potluck.
- 2. Be creative in your publicity.** Make your invitation—well, inviting! Consider incorporating some humor into your invitation. Wherever possible, extend personal invitations—at Mass, after school, or through a telephone tree. Include these events in school newsletters or send postcard reminders. If parents don't show

up the first time, let them know you missed them and that you look forward to seeing them the next time.

- 3. Offer child care.** When offering your parent sessions, you may want to offer a nursery for preschoolers and gather primary, intermediate, and junior high students in classrooms and provide video movies and popcorn. (Popcorn isn't too hard to vacuum up. Ask the children to help.)
- 4. Be inclusive.** Acknowledge the many forms of family that exist in your parish. Grandparents or other caregivers may be raising children. Newly arrived families of ethnic groups other than the majority ethnic group of your school or parish may not yet feel comfortable. Make a special effort to welcome them. Provide sessions in a second language if possible or provide a translator in your session if the numbers are not large enough to justify a second-language workshop.
- 5. Welcome, welcome, welcome.** The most important thing you can do is provide excellent hospitality by being present to family members. And providing an organized lesson plan will allow participants to go home feeling good about the session. The spirit of the event

is what will bring them back a second time.

In all of these ways, you are communicating the value you place on the parents and their role, and showing them that you are there to serve them in every way you can.

