

RAISING

FAITH-

FILLED

KIDS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

by Tom McGrath

LOYOLAPRESS.
A JESUIT MINISTRY

Dear Partner in Ministry,

Nearly every parent I've ever met has wanted what was best for his or her child. Yet, when it comes to giving their child a solid grounding in faith, most parents feel—at least at times—less than fully prepared. The church tells them they are the first teachers of the faith to their children, and yet they often feel ill-equipped for the task.

And so they turn to the parish in hopes that “experts” can do the job. And, of course, the parish (whether a religious education program or Catholic school) has an important role to play. But so do the parents, and that's why I wrote *Raising Faith-Filled Kids: Ordinary Opportunities to Nurture Faith at Home*. My hope was that a practical, down-to-earth book could help parents begin to imagine the many ways ordinary family life offers abundant chances to initiate their child in a comprehensive Catholic way of life.

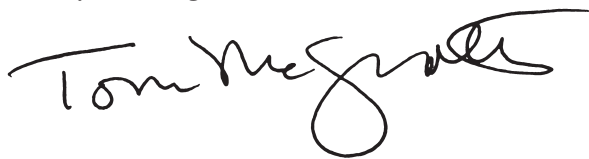
Raising Faith-Filled Kids will help moms and dads discover the hidden holiness in family life and find ways to amplify that holiness and nurture it in the course of days, seasons, and years. It looks at the ways parents actually hand on a living faith, the virtues they need, and the lessons they communicate. It invites parents to see the hand of God in both the joys and challenges of being a family.

The book contains lots of “next step” suggestions as well as tips especially for dads and a list of 40 ways parents can add more prayer to their family's life. Parents will find plenty to think about, discuss, and pray about, as well as handy tips and suggestions they can put to use immediately. They'll also find sources of support and inspiration.

One valuable resource for parents is other parents. And so we're delighted to offer you this **FREE** discussion guide that will foster lively conversation, the sharing of ideas and experiences, and reflection on your own life. You're bound to learn a lot and also have a lot of fun.

So gather some parents who want to learn how to raise faith-filled kids, and have them read, discuss, share, laugh, and pray together. You will be giving these parents the support they need to indeed be the first—and best—teachers of the faith to the children God has given to their care.

Many blessings,



Tom McGrath

Session 1

GOAL

Help parents discover the importance of Christian living as a powerful tool to nurture their child's faith.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What kind of religious art or images are present in your home?
- What's the story behind those images? What makes them so meaningful to you?
- Share a story of how your parents taught you an important lesson about living your faith.
- Share a memory of when your parents taught you—through their actions—what it means to be a faith-filled person.

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- The importance of traditions in family life
- Caring for those in need through word and action
- The impact of religious art in the home
- The Bible at home

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 3–15

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Stop a moment to ask yourself, “What do I wish for my child?” Try to put your thoughts into words. Think back to when your child first arrived in your life—how you felt, what your hopes were. Think of difficult times your child has faced—anything from life-threatening moments to a difficult time at school. Were you able to deepen your understanding of your hopes for this child? Do you find that your hopes affect how you've raised your child? Pray for the grace to understand God's hopes for your child.

For more suggestions, go to pages 24–25.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 2

GOAL

Help parents reflect on the hopes and dreams they have for their children and the role that religion might play in the lives of their children.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why did you bring your child to be baptized?
- How do you celebrate the sacraments in your family (Baptism, First Communion, First Reconciliation, Confirmation, etc.)?
- What kinds of challenges will your children likely face in the years to come? How might faith help them respond to those challenges?

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- How Baptism speaks to both our desires and our fears for our child's life and future
- How suffering and difficulties are a natural part of life and how faith can help us handle the pain these things cause
- Developing a healthy relationship with the Good Shepherd so that your children can walk through the valley of darkness
- Things you want for your children versus what they want for themselves; the future they are building; how to be a helpful influence

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 17–24

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Celebrate the anniversary of your child's Baptism. Prepare a lovely dinner and invite your child's godparents to dine with you. If you still have your child's baptismal candle, light it as a reminder of the celebration. As a part of your grace, renew your faith commitments and ask God for help. Prayer will be a great tool to clarify your intentions and lead you to creative ways to help your children grow in age and grace. Ask the godparents to write a letter to their godson or goddaughter. The child may read it once her or she is old enough to understand and enjoy this gift of faith and support (see page 27).

For more suggestions, go to pages 24–25.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 3

GOAL

Help parents become aware of the positive influence their loving presence has on the lives of their children.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How is raising a family like running a family business?
- Name five ways you avoid being present with your child and five ways you succeed in being present to your child.
- Do you think parents today are having a difficult time being present to their children? Why do you think this is so?

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- How parenting is a full-time commitment, requiring adjustments, care, compassion, and undivided attention
- Making parenting a top priority in your life
- Joys and sorrows of parenting
- What happens when parents care more for their careers and material well-being than for their children
- Teaching about faith and values through words and actions

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 29–45

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Think ahead to the day your children will be on their own. How do you imagine they have turned out? What do you have to do now to help bring about that successful outcome? Write it down! Clearly state your hopes and dreams, and what you are going to do to make them happen. What roll will faith play in your plans? Compare notes with your spouse. Evaluate how equipped you are to make this happen.

For more suggestions, go to pages 36–41.
If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 4

GOAL

Help parents develop practices where they can naturally pass along their faith through their words and actions.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Name three values you hope to hand down to your children.
- When you were growing up, who was the most positive influence on your spirituality and faith? What lesson did he or she teach you?
- What is the spiritual legacy you would like to give to your children?

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- How relationships with extended family help children learn faith and a sense of belonging
- How family traditions, passed on from generation to generation, can be a means of teaching the practices of the faith
- Discovering the impact that special feasts and celebrations have on our children
- Our methods of handing down religion and faith
- The role religion plays in adolescents' lives
- The way we learn about God, life, and ourselves

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 55–69

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Keep ethnic and religious traditions alive. Are there practices you experienced when you were little that you have let lapse, such as special meals or decorations tied to feasts and seasons? Reincorporate these practices into your family. These traditions once spoke volumes to you, and they can speak to your children today.

For more suggestions, go to pages 70–71.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 5

GOAL

Help parents discover the sacramental value of sacred objects and places, that are part of our daily life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How would you define “the sacred”?
- Can you name one or more “sacred” objects, actions, or places in your life?
- Name and share a meaningful story that is connected to one of your sacred objects.

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- How meaningful objects are silent witnesses of the way we experience God in our midst
- Discovering the sacred outside our religious practices
- The way sacred things talk to us through the story that lies behind them
- Family time as sacred moments to enjoy, share, and connect
- How daily sharing prepares us to celebrate the Eucharist
- Enjoying and celebrating the rhythm of life in our families (liturgical year and Paschal Mystery)

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 73–85

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Let your refrigerator door preach your values. Put up pictures of children, godchildren, and family friends, prayer cards commemorating relatives who have died, photos of children you sponsor through foreign-relief services, snippets of text that you find inspiring, a motto you want to live by, a favorite family prayer. Everything you put up on your refrigerator door also takes a spot in your children’s subconscious. Use that space wisely.

For more suggestions, go to pages 80–83, 86–87.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 6

GOAL

Help parents see the world through the eyes of faith, which sometimes requires accepting and celebrating mystery and paradox.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is the greatest mystery in your life?
- In the Gospels, Jesus says that to find yourself you have to lose yourself.
What do you think he means by this?
- What are some other Gospel stories where Jesus says something that is unexpected?
What might he mean?
- How do you think God sees the world? Is it different from how we see the world?

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- Appreciating mystery and paradox
- Seeing the world through the eyes of faith
- Finding deeper meaning in our personal and communal stories of faith

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 99–116

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Get in touch with nature! Nature is a great place to experience mystery and paradox: the beauty of a flower or tree that has grown from a seed. Go camping, take a nature walk, or do some gardening. Visit a local zoo or aquarium. Talk with your children about how we can experience God in the world around us.

For more suggestions, go to pages 103–105.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 7

GOAL

Help parents experience God in the everyday joys and sorrows of family life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How have you experienced God in the ins and outs of daily life?
- Do you have any personal rituals in which you celebrate your role as a parent?
- How does your family ritualize its daily joys and sorrows?
- What is something that you can do every day to develop a friendship with Jesus?
- How does your family celebrate times of sorrow and times of joy?

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- Ordinary ritual moments that parents are already observing and celebrating
- Experiencing God in everyday life
- Sacramental awareness
- Family life as a sacred path

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 117–128

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Celebrate! Create a new family ritual to celebrate something of meaning and importance to your family, or revive a ritual or tradition you enjoyed as a child. Maybe choose to celebrate the anniversary of everyone's baptism or the first day of school. Include prayers and stories to help celebrate the event.

For more suggestions, go to pages 122–123, 125–126.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 8

GOAL

Help parents recognize and name the many virtues they practice as parents, and how these virtues offer strength to live out their vocation.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Name a time when your inner strength helped you handle a difficult parenting situation?
- What is one of your strongest virtues? How does this help you be a better parent?
- What is one virtue you could work on developing? How could you work on this?
- Think about a time when you lost your patience with your children or spouse. How could you have responded differently?

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- Virtues in family life
- Parenting requires strength
- Patience as living in the moment

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 129–152

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Live in the moment! Choose something you can do together as a family. Take a walk, go to the park, or go out for pizza and ice cream. Fully engage in whatever you decide to do. Leave behind everything else, at least for the moment: a homework assignment, a work project, or chores that need to be done.

For more suggestions, go to pages 134–135.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 9

GOAL

Help parents understand the importance of welcoming their children, setting boundaries, and letting children go.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Think about an experience of being welcomed. How did this make you feel? Why is welcoming and accepting an important part of being a parent?
- How well do you accept changes in your children as they grow?
- How do you demonstrate forgiveness to the members of your family?
- How are new members welcomed into your family?
- Why do you set boundaries for your children?

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- Parenting requires self-discipline
- The art of welcoming, accepting, and letting go
- The act of forgiveness as a vital part of family life

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 153–182

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Imagine! Read the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), and imagine yourself in the story. Are you like any of the characters in the parable? If you were the younger brother, would you do anything differently? If you were the older brother, would you do anything differently? How would it feel to be the father?

For more suggestions, go to pages 160–162.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 10

GOAL

Help parents uncover any misconceptions they may have about God and demonstrate how these misconceptions influence their children's understanding of who God is.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- When you were a child, how did the adults in your life influence your image of God?
- What is your current image of God? Has this image changed over time?
- What words do you use to describe God? What do these words say about your understanding of God?
- What do the sacraments tell you about God and how God feels about us? How does our society speak about God, and how does this affect our own image of God?

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- How our words and images of God reflect our relationship with God
- Misconceptions about who God is
- God is loving and forgiving

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 183–190

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Take a tour! Walk through your house and look at any religious images or artifacts you have. What do these tell you about God? Are there any images you might add that reflect your current understanding of God? Talk with your children about what these images mean to you and what they say about your relationship with God.

For more suggestions, go to pages 188–189.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 11

GOAL

Help parents discover the importance of prayer and how they can help their children develop a habit of prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is prayer?
- What was the first prayer you learned by heart? Who taught it to you?
- Share a story of prayer in your daily lives

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- Prayer and its various forms
- The Christian family as the first place for education in prayer
- How family life offers a number of natural opportunities for ritual and prayer
- Simple activities and ideas for praying with children
- The importance of introducing your children to religious themes and hymns

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 191–220

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Strengthen a good habit. Take a minute to write down three parenting skills you are really good at. Pick one and think about how you can put this strength to good use on a daily basis. When the flu hits your household, you know how illness can be passed from person to person. But healthy living is contagious too. Exercising your strengths can benefit those with whom you live.

For more suggestions, go to pages 197, 211–214.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 12

GOAL

Help parents discover the richness in sharing stories with their children and to become aware of God's presence in our lives through those stories.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Who is/was the storyteller in your family?
- How can a story be used as a life lesson for your children?
- Share a story that helped you feel a closer relationship with God and your children.

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- How our own experiences provide lessons not only for us but for our children
- How to develop a healthy self story and help tie our children's story into the larger story
- Learning to recognize how our children's stories are the reflection of our personal experiences

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 223–233

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Tell your children how they got their names. What's the significance? Who else in the family bears that name? Tell why you were given the name you have and how you feel about that name.

For more suggestions, go to pages 231–233.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 13

GOAL

Help parents be aware of their role in God's ongoing work of creation (salvation) and help their children recognize that they have a leading role to play as well.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does it mean to you to hear the words "You are a child of God"?
- What is our role as family in God's great story of salvation?
- How are we as parents helping our children play a positive role in this world?

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- Who we are as children of God
- The importance of thinking about the thoughts, feelings, and needs of others
- Helping our children find their true identities
- Comparing the message of modern media to the message of Jesus

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 235–247

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Help your children meet other people, especially from other cultures and ethnic groups, who hold the same values you do, whether at church, at work, in community organizations, or in the neighborhood.

As a family, read books from other cultures that will enlighten you on how other people are contributing positively to build a better world.

For more suggestions, go to pages 240–242.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 14

GOAL

Help parents reflect on how they can shape the future by modeling the importance of peace and justice.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- If you can imagine a happy life in an ideal world, what would it look like?
- What kind of a world are we preparing for our children?
- Name three lessons or values you are teaching your children that will help them take care of the world and its inhabitants.

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- The values Jesus modeled during his life: inclusiveness, humility, and discipleship
- Empathy as the fundamental building block of moral life
- How to educate children about justice
- The meaning and importance of solidarity

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 249–268

WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Share stories of injustice from our human history. This should not become a shame-and-blame operation. Rather, the point is that we need to acknowledge that unfairness can be subtle and embedded in systems that appear morally good. It's part of any complete moral education.

Educate yourself. Read newspapers and listen to talk radio when people from other cultures call in. Don't read only what you already know and agree with. It's good to hear another perspective.

For more suggestions, go to pages 257–258, 261–262, 265–266.

If none of these activities fit your needs, tell the group about a practice that works for you.

Session 15

GOAL

Help parents be aware that God is always with them in their journey of faith and in all the challenges they will face as a family. Help parents recognize that God can offer strength and support in their vocation.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- As a parent, what are the doubts and fears you have when you look into the future?
- Do you trust that God will be with you every step of the way?
- Talk about an experience when you felt God's presence help you in your role as a parent.

THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

- That God's love will always be with you in those moments of fear and doubt

Raising Faith-Filled Kids, pages 271–272

CLOSING ACTIVITY

Being that this is the last of the sessions, prepare a special prayer service for parents. Give them a pin, card, or certificate as a symbol of their efforts to become better parents and better stewards of God's gifts.

You might also want to have a fiesta or potluck to celebrate the experience of growing together as members of a larger community.

Make sure you invite the pastor, family life ministers, and other pastoral staff for a final blessing and sending forth to the families who have grown in a lived faith.

Loyola Press offers several resources to help parents nurture
a living faith in their children.

Raising Faith-Filled Kids

Ordinary Opportunities to Nurture Spirituality at Home
Tom McGrath

The Meal Box

Fun Questions and Family Faith Tips to Get Mealtime Conversations Cookin'
Bret Nicholaus and Tom McGrath

52 Simple Ways to Talk with Your Kids about Faith

Opportunities for Catholic Families to Share God's Love
James P. Campbell, D.Min.

Raising Kids Who Will Make a Difference

Helping Your Family Live with Integrity, Value Simplicity, and Care for Others
Susan Vogt

For more information about these resources or to purchase them,
please visit www.loyolapress.com