

The Domestic Church Reflection

The weeks of lockdown and isolation have touched us all in so many ways, not least in our work as catechists. Parishes around the diocese would have been celebrating First Holy Communion Masses right now. We do not know when those celebrations will now take place or even when we will be able to meet with children and parents again.

This situation is not of our making and it is not one that any of us would have chosen. But perhaps the Holy Spirit is calling us to think of new ways of doing things – to look for new and different ways of encouraging parents to become the first teachers of their child in faith. The Risen Lord came to his discouraged and fearful disciples even through locked doors.

The Church teaches us that the family is the ‘domestic church’, a cell that makes up the larger church. The family is almost a parish in miniature. It turns out that our theology is right: parents are the first teachers of their children, whether they like it or not. How often do we lament that parents are not passing on faith to their own children and that they rely too much on us as parish catechists to do it for them? But no matter how good we are as catechists, we can never replace the parents. We can supplement their work. We can even try to do it for them. However, we can only ever be supporters or substitutes. We have now been forced into a situation where we need to help and empower these parents to share their faith with their own children or else it is not going to happen at all.

It is not as if the classroom and textbook model we have been using was working well for us anyway. So often we do not see families again after first Communion. Generations of young Catholics are dropping out of the Church.

It is not easy to motivate many parents to act at home for lots of reasons. They do not feel ‘qualified’; their own faith may be weak and undeveloped; they have been brought up to think that priests, teachers and catechists are the ‘experts’. At the present time they have many other concerns and worries: job security; finance; keeping well; family tensions; distant friends and relatives. As in any area of catechesis or faith development all we can really do is provide them with opportunities and encouragement. In the end, they have to want to do this!

Presently there are three main ways that we partner with parents: parent sessions led by a catechist; whole family catechesis events (parents and children working together in one room); send-home resources. We put most of our emphasis on the first two, situations when we are there to guide and ‘supervise’. Perhaps for now (and for the future) we should be thinking more about the quality and availability of the resources and materials we can provide for the home.

In fact, we have a very special opportunity at the moment. Parents are stuck at home with bored children and are often desperate for things to occupy them and stimulate them. Could we introduce them to some fun, interesting faith-based activities? They need to be downloadable, engaging, easy to follow, fun and suitable for family involvement.

Providing for and encouraging the domestic church is not just a replacement activity for the current pandemic situation. It is an opportunity to think and develop new ways of prayer and faith sharing for an exciting, if challenging future.

This reflection is also available as a video [here](#).

Fr Chris Lough – September 2020