

Necessary
Conversations

Prepare Them
First



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1

SEPTEMBER, 2019

Preparing for Another School Year

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- **Moms and Dads find time to converse daily with their children.**
- **Parents will embrace their role as primary educators for their kids.**
- **Parents will love their children in the same way that God does; selflessly, consistently, unconditionally.**
- **Parents will love their children for who they are rather than for what they do.**
- **Families will cultivate deep friendships within their extended family.**
- **Parents will make time to pray daily with and for their children.**
- **No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.**
- **Families will desire to have holy homes.**

Ready or not, here it comes. School is back in session!

So much changes with the start of a school year. Some families look at the return to set schedules, planned activities and earlier bedtimes with delight while other families loathe the loss of spontaneity and impulsivity. The personality of your family certainly colors how you will embrace the start of the academic year.

When the school bell rings, it is easy for all families to focus on the logistics of daily planning (you know – Are the backpacks ready? Does everyone have socks and shoes? Is homework complete? Who's taking cold lunch?) The need to prepare for each day's classes and activities can certainly become priority #1 for everyone. Being prepared can become the **most important** motto for daily family life.

As a parent, it is easy to get lost in the details of having *everything* ready each day. But, is that truly what is most important? Which is more worthy - making sure that every **person** is ready or having every **thing** in order? Clearly, preparing a child for school is much more important than preparing a backpack.

Can you guess who is the best person to prep a child for the ups and downs of this year's learning? It is the parent. It is not the teacher, the para-educator, the school counselor, the coach or after school liaison. It is you: the mom or the dad.

Parents are best suited for this role precisely because they know their child better than anyone else. By example, a parent knows that a child who needs more sleep must have an earlier bedtime. A parent with a forgetful child knows how to allow extra time to pack their backpack. A parent with an anxious child know how to put a note of encouragement in a lunch sack.

Here's reality; parents have the easiest access to what is going on inside their child. Parents are designed by God to know what their children need from the inside out. Parents are given the capacity to release and guide the emotions, thoughts and tendencies of the child. They are like a tap on a maple tree that coaxes the flow of sap from within to the outside world.



Because humanity passes by way of the family...

Having the easiest access does not imply that drawing out a child's inner self is effortless. Nothing like stating the obvious, right? Staying connected to your child (and keeping your child connected to you) requires time, attention and patience. Fortunately, there is one action that you can develop and use each day that literally enhances your ability to stay connected. It's your capacity to talk with your child. Meaningful conversation between a child and his or her parents is the way to make the invisible world that is within your child become visible to you.

Perhaps that is why conversation with a family meal or dialogue just before bedtime is considered so powerful and effective by researchers. Parents who are adept at conversation with their children plan for a daily exchange. They make it a priority to talk every day. They know that the daily face-to-face exchange is critical to family unity and fosters readiness for life.

Research also reveals that the strongest bonds of love and respect are created through expressed care and loving support. Parents also learn that the daily conversation focuses first on *how* the child is doing and then on *what* the child is doing. They strive to make themselves available and approachable. And, they do their best to give their child the benefit of the doubt.

How prepared are you to engage your child this year and learn about their thoughts, emotions and tendencies?

Preparing Yourself for Necessary Conversations

If you really want to see your child exceed and succeed this school year, begin by preparing yourself to guide them through the best school year yet. Check your readiness for this school year by asking the following questions of yourself.

- Am I ready and able to prepare my child for another school year?
- How confident am I in my capacity to hold a daily discussion with my child about school and related life issues?
- Do I think that I have what it takes to express what I think and what I believe to my child?
- Am I ready to listen what my child has to say and keep him or her engaged in conversation?
- Do I know how to use conversation to guide my child towards the best in every situation?

If your answers to these questions is less than a definite YES, let TWL help you become confident in your capacity to talk with your children. Learn how to engage children in conversation and guide them towards the best in every situation during the 5 part "Necessary Conversations" webinar series. Register for the series today at twl4parents.com/necessary-conversations-webinar/. The first session is free.

This challenge is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the Teaching the Way of Love program, which can be found at the same website.

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Please Pray That

- Moms and Dads find time to converse daily with their children.
- Parents will embrace their role as primary educators for their kids.
- Parents will have the courage to teach their children the beauty of God's plan for sex and marriage.
- Our children will be open to marriage as a vocation and a Sacrament.
- Parents will make time to pray daily with and for their children.
- No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.
- Families will desire to have holy homes.
- Children will seek the love of God rather than the approval of the world.

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 2

OCTOBER, 2019

Having Necessary Conversations About Human Sexuality

As a parent of a son and daughter, both in middle school, I am deeply concerned about the perception of sexuality that my children are absorbing through the culture they are immersed in. The sexual revolution has caused us to accept a number of assumptions about sexuality rather than the good news that God intends. The culture promised that the sexual revolution would lead to greater happiness. But has it? All objective indications tell us that it hasn't. People - especially women - report far less happiness in their relationships, less sexual satisfaction, and less happiness in general. In fact, researchers report increased stress and frustration despite all objective indications of prosperity. The American Economic Journal (August 2009) even gave this phenomenon a name: the "Paradox of Declining Female Happiness."

As a Catholic parent, I have to give serious consideration to the possibility (I would even say the likelihood) that this drop in happiness may have something to do with our culture's rejection of God's loving plan for human sexuality. So when I have conversations with my son and daughter about sexuality and chastity, my main goal is to share with them the fulfillment of love that God intends; what will truly make them happy.



Why does our cultural understanding of sexuality ultimately lead to dissatisfaction? For the most part, our culture has defined sexuality as a physical act that is done for pleasure and self-expression. A sexual relationship is judged based on the level of pleasure and on emotional connection. The sexual "marketplace" becomes a competition based on attractiveness and sexual "skill." Consequently, young people are even more obsessed with not measuring up than they have ever been. Talk about a life of stress and frustration! Not only that, but many women have learned to trade sex for power, material gain, or attention. Many young women report seeing sex as a "duty" to their partner done in exchange for keeping the relationship.

Because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

In contrast, God gives us the gift of sex in the context of our vocation to love with complete, selfless love. For Catholics, the term sexuality refers to the ability to give and receive love as a man or a woman. So sexuality is much more than just an act. It affects every part of us, especially our capacity to love, to procreate, and to form bonds of communion with others (see CCC 2332).

Following God's plan frees us from judging ourselves based on impossible scales of attractiveness and sexual skill. Instead, we judge ourselves on our ability to love: to will the good of the other. And we can always grow in love. When we follow God's plan, sexuality draws us out of ourselves and makes it possible for us to focus on the other. That is why it finds its full expression in the creation of new life and in family love. That is also why our home is to be a "school of love" in which we learn intensely how to love as Jesus loves.

So while God's plan is challenging, it does not set us or our children up for the frustration and disappointment that our culture seems to. This is especially true because when we follow God's will, He gives us grace to help us to live out His plan. With God's help, we can lead our children to the full joy of God's plan for human sexuality and love.

Preparing Yourself for a Necessary Conversation on Human Sexuality

Through conversations with your son or daughter, you can share the good news of God's plan for human sexuality. Prepare yourself for these conversations by asking yourself the following questions:

- How versed am I in the Church's teachings on human sexuality? Do I understand how God's plan impacts marriage, family, and my ability to will the good of the other?
- Do I truly see God's way as good news, or do I chafe at what I perceive as restrictions in the moral law?
- Can I express to my son or daughter the difference between the apparent freedom our culture offers and the true, long-term freedom that God offers?
- Am I enthusiastic about helping my son or daughter plan his or her life around God's truth and goodness? Am I enthusiastic about planning **my** life around God's plan as well?

Teaching the Way of Love can help you prepare for this necessary conversation with your son or daughter. The second session in the "Necessary Conversations" webinar series focuses on having necessary conversations about sex and chastity. Register for the series today at www.twl4parents.com/necessary-conversations-webinar/.

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Necessary Conversations

On God's Plan for Gender

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- All parents find time to study God's plan for men and women.
- Parents will embrace their role as primary educators for their kids.
- Families will share the truth of God clearly and with charity.
- Parents will love their children for who they are rather than for what they do.
- Parents will love their children in the same way that God does; selflessly, consistently, unconditionally.
- Parents will make time to pray daily with and for their children.
- No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.
- Families will desire to do God's will.



VOLUME 7, ISSUE 3

Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family...

NOVEMBER, 2019

Understanding Gender Identity

There are two things that really frustrate me: being confused and not being told the truth. That is why the culture's campaign on gender is difficult for me to understand. Can you relate?

The term *gender* is confusing to me because it used to mean the same thing as "male" or "female" (a biological reality). However, today's culture defines gender as a belief that one's bodily sex (being born either male or female) is irrelevant because a male on the outside can be a female on the inside or vice versa.

Changing the meaning of the word gender makes it difficult to know what is true and what isn't. It certainly seems like the two definitions are opposed. How can we figure out what is right? Let me suggest that we tackle this issue by going back to the first stories of mankind that are found in the Bible.

The very first chapter of the Bible clearly tells us that God created human persons in only two forms; male and female. It explains that the sexual difference is a gift to us from our Creator. The Bible also reveals that being male or female is very good because it makes it possible to create new life and form bonds of deep love.



The Bible also shares that the human body has great meaning and dignity. It is not a "thing" we possess, like a car or a laptop. It is much more than a container for our soul. The body allows us to make visible that which is invisible inside us. It speaks a "language" that should express the truth of who we are created by God as either a male or female.

In God's plan, each person is designed to be matched biologically inside and out. In fact, science confirms that it is scientifically impossible to be born in the wrong body because there are just two sex chromosomes: X and Y. Females have two X chromosomes and males have one X and one Y. Evidence of being female or male is found in nearly every cell in the body.

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

It becomes easier to wade through the puzzling gender debates when you begin with this information. Yet, some of you may ask, “What about the child who is born with ambiguous genitalia? Isn’t this proof that there could be another option beyond male or female?” When this happens on rare occasions, medical and genetic tests can discover the biological sex (XX or XY) and the nature of the defect involved. It does not open the door to the creation of third biological sex.

If these facts are true, why are we hearing so much about LGBTQ and being told that we need to let everyone – especially our children - identify themselves as they prefer? That is a great question that I can’t fully answer in this newsletter. But I can share with you a few quick facts from research that might dispel the confusion.

- The gender debate began in the 1960s when psychologist named John Money decided that people should identify themselves by their social preferences and behavior rather than their biology. This opened the door for boys who liked dance to think of themselves as girls or for girls who prefer trucks to think of themselves as boys.
- In the last 10 years, the trend to identify as transgender has dramatically increased after exposure to the concept by peers or social media. This ‘social contagion’ is called Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria.
- Youth who are allowed to explore the concept of transgender, rarely find that they are more mentally stable and happy in the long run.
- Up to 98% of youth who struggle with their sex as a boy or a girl, outgrow this condition by adulthood.

For a full listing of credible Church and scientific sources on gender go to: <https://catholicwomensforum.org/resources/>

Preparing Yourself for Necessary Conversations about Gender

Clearly, gender ideology is a hot topic in society today; one that must be dealt with respectfully and intelligently. Here are several suggestions to help you become more informed and equipped to faithfully translate God’s plan to your children.

- Make plans now to attend the Necessary Conversations Webinar on Gender on Monday, November 11th at 8PM. Register at: twl4parents.com/webinar. Cost is \$6 and includes the live webinar, all downloadable resources and a post recording of the webinar.
- Teach your children about the Theology of the Body which beautifully describes God’s plan for us. Check in with your parish to see what resources they have on hand.
- Remember to treat all persons with respect and dignity. All youth, even those who suffer with gender confusion, deserve the same educational opportunities and resources. They also deserve to know the truth about God’s plan. This means that we need to share the truth in clearly and with charity.

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Please Pray That

- Parents will help their children to seek the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.
- Families will support each other in carrying their crosses and following the difficult path of discipleship.
- Families will foster an attitude of gratitude and contentment to combat the materialism of our culture.
- Families will walk through Advent together to prepare their hearts for the coming of Christ.
- Families will joyfully work to put God at the center of all they do.
- Parents will encourage their children to seek God's will for their lives.
- Families will support those who struggle to carry their crosses with compassionate love.

Volume 7, Issue 4

December, 2019

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me

As we approach Christmas our thoughts are drawn to the comfortable sights and sounds of the holiday. As followers of Jesus, we remember the “reason for the season” by reflecting on Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. Another thing that Christmas should remind us of, however, is that the manger that the baby Jesus was born in led to the cross that our savior would die on. So even though it’s not Lent or Easter, this is a great time for Christians to reflect on Jesus’ command to carry our own cross and follow Him. As Catholic parents, this is an important theme to discuss with our children, especially when we talk about any moral or social issue. How is Jesus calling us to take up our cross and follow Him?

There’s an old Christian story that my mind keeps coming back to. It’s the story of a man in the midst of some suffering who prays, “Oh, Lord, this cross is just too big and heavy for me to bear! I can’t carry it anymore. Please take this cross from me and give me another.” The Lord answers his prayer in a vision. The man finds himself standing in a room full of crosses. He hears the Lord say, “I have answered your prayer. I have taken your cross from you. You may choose any cross in its place.” As the man explores the room of crosses, he finds that each one is larger and heavier than the last. He searches the entire room until he finally finds the smallest cross in the room, close to the door where he started his search. “There! I’ll take that one! It’s the smallest and lightest cross here!” Jesus responds, “But, my dear son. That’s the cross you came here to give up!”



The Burden of the Cross

Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:38 that we must take up our cross and follow Him. The cross Jesus asks us to bear includes our suffering, our tendency to sin, and our disordered human nature. Jesus calls us to strive against the effects of Original Sin in our lives. Taking up our cross is not easy. It is an act of loving sacrifice for God. But we do not do it alone. When we follow Christ, He walks with us and works in us to transform our hearts. By cooperating with grace and striving against our fallen human nature we grow in holiness and become more like Him.

However, like the man in the story, we want to be relieved of the burden of our cross. One way we seek this relief is by embracing a philosophy called modernism; a belief that we are free to believe what we want because truth evolves or changes. We think we are free to create our own reality. At first glance, modernism seems compassionate because it eliminates the burden of guilt and shame that sometimes comes with trying to adhere to “traditional truth claims” like the moral law. But, is it really possible to escape this burden by

redefining ourselves? Or are we, like the man in the story, looking in vain for a lighter cross only to find our new cross an even greater burden?

The Greater Burden

Influenced by modernism, we have been encouraging young people to define themselves in every area of their lives. Instead of asking them what they think God is calling them to be, we ask them what they want to be when they grow up. We tell them that they have limitless potential, that they can be whatever they set their mind on being. But the truth is that the expectation to define themselves puts a great burden on a young person. “How do I define myself from scratch? If I have limitless potential to be whatever I want to be, how do I choose? What if I choose wrong and squander my potential?” The modern concept of **creating** one’s identity rather than **finding** it through a process of self-discovery has actually made the adolescent “identity crisis” worse. In fact, some psychologists are now warning against putting our children under what they call “the burden of potential” (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/growing-friendships/201111/lifting-the-burden-potential>).

But doesn’t modernism at least get rid of that old “Catholic guilt” that has plagued us for so many generations? The truth is, someone who suffers from a disordered heart - maybe with the desires of one or more of the Seven Capital Sins (pride, greed, lust, sloth, gluttony, envy, or anger) or maybe with more specific disorders such as gender confusion or same-sex attraction or narcissism - may indeed find temporary relief by redefining themselves and their “personal reality” in a way that makes these desires acceptable. However, they don’t find long-term relief. For example, couples who divorce in order to relieve marital strife on the whole report less happiness years later than couples who stay together and work through the trials. Children who go through sex reassignment surgery tend not to find peace and, in fact, are in greater danger of suicidal tendencies after their surgery.

My Yoke is Easy and My Burden is Light

Jesus took on human nature in order to show us the way to the fulfillment of God’s love. In the Beatitudes, He taught us to reject our sinful nature and to embrace His very virtues. Even though Jesus’ path takes us through the “way of suffering,” it ends in beatitude - true fulfillment of God’s goodness. Jesus’ call to strive against our disordered, fallen humanity and to strive for holiness may seem like an impossibly high expectation. But soon after Jesus tells us to take up our cross in Matthew 10, He has these words for us:

“Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

The burden of following our culture is to sacrifice our ultimate fulfillment for the sake of an immediate sense of freedom. The burden of following Christ is to endure immediate suffering for the sake of lasting glory.

Which Cross Do We Ask Them to Bear?

Find time during Advent and Christmas to talk with your son or daughter about Christ’s command to pick up our cross. As you do, here are some talking points to discuss:

- Being tempted to sin and sinning are not the same thing. Why is this?
- Striving to do what is right and good in the face of these tendencies and temptations is part of the cross Jesus asks us to carry. How do we do what is right when we are tempted?
- We are all disordered in some way due to original sin. We are all sinners. How should we treat people who are struggling to overcome a temptation?
- In addition to Jesus’ support of grace, He also calls us to support each other in our struggle to carry our cross. What can we do to help someone who is struggling?
- God’s will for us is always to discover the truth about who we are and who He created us to be. His ultimate goal for us is holiness. What did Jesus show us about self-sacrifice and the path to holiness?

This article tells about just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the **Teaching the Way of Love** program, which can be found at the same website.

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**Necessary
Conversations**

**On Following
His Plan**



VOLUME 7, ISSUE 5

Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

JANUARY, 2020

Set a Firm Foundation in 2020

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- All families find time to discuss how they will follow God in 2020.
- Parents will embrace their role as primary educators for their kids.
- Parents will share the truth about God's love clearly and with charity.
- Parents will correct their children's behavior without hardening their hearts.
- Parents will love their children in the same way that God does; selflessly, consistently, unconditionally.
- Parents will make time to pray daily with and for their children.
- No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.
- Families will desire to do God's will.

The new year has begun and with it a new decade. Take just a moment to think back over the past ten years. Reflect upon this question. *What has changed in your life since 2010?* You may have married and started a family. You might have changed employment or the place you reside. Perhaps you experienced something life-altering that either caused you great joy or pain.

How would you respond if I asked you this question? What has stayed the same? You may be able to think of many things that remained unchanged; same job, same home, same friends, same parish. You might even say that you still strive to live by God's Ten Commandments despite the various changes that have happened to you over the past ten years.

One more question, what do you think life will look like in 2030? How will your family mature? Will your work requirements adjust up or down? What health concerns will concern you? What will you hold sacred? What will you want to let go of?

Each new year (and in this case new decade) is a perfect time to ask and answer these deeper questions in order to maximize the joy in one's life and minimize unnecessary agony. A truthful reflection at the beginning of a year helps you take stock of your foundational beliefs and morals which should remain unchanging despite the turn of the calendar and think about rules of life that will help you stand firm in any situation.

Recall Matthew 7: 24-27 which tells us to build our home (and life) upon a rock. Why? That which is built on rock will not collapse when buffeted by rain, wind or storms. A life that is built on firm footings (personal commitments to follow God) will not be tossed by life's pressures. It will not break down or fail.



Because humanity passes by way of the family...

What societal issues can breach your foundation and shake your personal commitment to follow God? Consider how the culture wants to give internet availability to your children when it gives access to both the bright and dark side of the web. Ponder how your kids want to use social media rather than have a face to face conversation. Think how the porn industry wants to be a normal form of entertainment for teens. Reflect on the explosion of cyber bullying and its impact on the self-worth of adolescents and young adults. Think about society's redefinition of marriage and gender. Reflect on the changes in state and federal laws that impact the sanctity of life from conception to natural death.

Let's face it. Today's societal beliefs will pressure you and your family in the coming days and years. They will try to convince you that truth and morality can change with time and circumstance. They will tempt you to gather wealth and fame and to pursue busyness and enlightenment instead of finding peace in just being a child of God. They will try to lure you into elevating your own thoughts above God's laws.

It is likely that today's culture won't encourage you to develop self-control or self-denial. It won't ask you to live in moderation or to suffer for the sake of another. It won't suggest that you believe in absolute truth and deny relative thinking. That is why it is vital that you talk with your family soon about setting a firm foundation in 2020.

Preparing a Necessary Conversation that will Set a Firm Foundation in 2020

The first step in this process falls to the parents who should make a joint commitment to follow all of God's commandments which set the firm foundation. Once a commitment has been made, they will develop several rules of life that will help them follow God's commandments as a family. Here are examples of 'rules of life' that set a firm foundation for a family to follow. (Families are encouraged to develop these as a family and to have more than one rule of life during the year.)

1. All personal devices will be used in the common living areas of the home, not in bedrooms.
2. Parents have the right to see any social media account that their children use. Parent's also have the right to deny access to social media.
3. The family will eat meals together. Personal devices will not be allowed to dine with the family.
4. Athletic or extracurricular events will be missed if they are scheduled at the same time as Mass.
5. Every family member will commit to pray daily with and for the other family members each.
6. Parents and children agree to learn more about God's plan for love by attending talks, webinars, listening to podcasts that are faithful to God's commandments. Parents should consider attending the upcoming Necessary Conversations webinar on the Harms of Pornography scheduled for Monday, Jan. 13th at 8PM. Register at: twl4parents.com/necessary-conversations-webinar/ .

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*God's Plan
for Us*

*Respect for
Others*



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

Please Pray That

- Families will be true schools of love, where all family members become more Christlike.
- Parents will help their children foster respect for all people.
- Families will be safe places to learn how to handle conflict and challenges to relationships.
- Parents will have the strength to teach their children selfless generosity in a culture of selfishness.
- Families will joyfully work to put God at the center of all they do.
- Our culture will reclaim the lost art of true friendship and civil respect.
- Victims of bullying will find healing and strength in the love of God.

Volume 7, Issue 6

February, 2020

Having Necessary Conversations About Right Relationships

As a child, I was the constant victim of bullying. I don't know why, but my sisters and I were consistently targets for bullies in our neighborhood, on our school bus, at school, and even in extracurricular activities. While I got through it in the end, bullying gave me very low self-esteem that I still struggle with today.

So as a father, I have been very vigilant to protect my children against bullying. At the slightest rumor that they were being bullied on the bus, I decided to drive them to and from school every day.

Imagine my surprise when I received a phone call from the principal of our children's school and heard that my own son was being accused of bullying. There is nothing more embarrassing to a Catholic parent than realizing that **your** child is a bully. But in my case it was even worse. I had already sacrificed daily to make sure that my children weren't bullied. I had talked to my children why bullying was bad and why I was so willing to help them avoid it. I had talked to them about the importance of standing up for themselves when they needed to, but avoiding people who just couldn't be reasoned with. So to admit that my son was bullying someone else was a grand ironic reversal.

It was time for another "Necessary Conversation."

I started the conversation by asking questions and listening. Starting with listening is especially important with my son because he gets defensive easily and shuts down. But it's really the best starting point for any parent in a similar situation. So I asked my son, "Tell me about this girls in school you seem to be having trouble with." He immediately responded, "Dad! She is so annoying! I can't stand her!" I asked him what he found so annoying about her and let him vent for a while. Then I asked him, "So how do you respond to her when she annoys you?" He wasn't very forthcoming with self-incriminating statements, so at this point in the conversation I brought up the complaints made about him. I asked him to examine his behaviors with me (refusing to listen to his objections that these things never happened). Did his behavior toward this girl make her any less annoying? No. Did his behavior toward this girl bring any good other than the feeling of revenge? No. In the end, whose behavior was worse - the girl's annoying behavior or the boy's mean behavior? Mine, I guess. Do you think anyone at school finds you annoying? Not really. What about the girls' friends who told the teacher on you? I guess. Would you think it was fair if they treated you the way you're treating this girl just because they found you annoying? I guess not.



Unfortunately but predictably, this initial conversation did not immediately fix the problem. We had a number of other conversations including talking about human dignity and the importance of respect, how his behavior was shaping his character, what effects his behaviors were having on this girl (she was afraid to even come to school), and what consequences he would face if this behavior continued (including being removed from the school). We discussed 1Thessalonians 5:11, “Encourage one another and build each other up,” and he earned the opportunity to memorize this verse by writing it over and over again.

Eventually my son got the message that his behavior was unacceptable and that my wife and I were not going to let up on it. He stopped bullying the girl and they actually grew friendly toward each other the next year. So the good news is that these conversations do work. That bad news is that they take a lot of work and perseverance. But that shouldn’t surprise any of us as Catholic parents, should it?

Now, you may be thinking, “Hopefully I will never need this conversation because my child will never be a bully.” Of course, I thought the same thing until I was proven wrong. The truth is, our children suffer from the effects of Original Sin. While they are created for love, love does not come naturally to them any more than it comes naturally to us. We all need to learn how to cooperate with the grace of Holy Charity, to learn how to love. So don’t put off this “Necessary Conversation” until there is a problem. Teach your children early and often how to love others, how to be a good friend, and how to respect everyone.

How Do We Teach Our Children to Love Others?

- Recognize that secular terms like “bullying” are often ambiguous and hardly ever cover the main goal of Catholic parenting. Make your goal to teach the fulness of charity - selfless love.
- Begin with a conversation about human dignity and why everyone - stranger or friend - deserves our respect because they are created in the Image and Likeness of God.
- Talk with your child about how she responds to people she doesn’t like. Develop strategies together for how to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43).
- Have frequent and regular conversations about your child’s relationships at school. Who is he playing with? Who doesn’t he like? Who doesn’t like him? How is he handling conflicts? How is he trying to be a blessing to others?



- Recognize that girls and boys are equally likely to “bully” but they do it in very different ways. Girls often bully under the radar, by passing notes, starting smear campaigns, or committing social media assassinations. Boys punch each other.

- Teach your child that true friendship is actually love (*philia*). In other words, friendship is not just about enjoying someone’s company or having fun together. It’s really part of Jesus’ plan for us to learn to love as He loves. Strategize with your child about how she can be a true friend.

- Pray with and for your child that he will grow in charity and form good, true friendships that will help him become their best selves and nurture true, Christlike love in them.

- Learn more about how to address bullying, right relationships, and friendship with young people, attend the upcoming Necessary Conversations webinar on Bullying and Right Relationships scheduled for Monday, Feb. 10th at 8PM. Register at: twl4parents.com/necessary-conversations-webinar/.

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Necessary Conversations

How to Deal with Struggles



VOLUME 9, ISSUE 5

Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family...

MARCH, 2020

Should I allow my child to struggle?

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- All families find ways to face and solve life's struggles without falling into despair.
- Parents will know when to step in or step aside when their kids fail.
- Parents will share the truth about God's love clearly and with charity.
- Parents will correct their children's behavior without hardening their hearts.
- Parents will love their children in the same way that God does; selflessly, consistently, unconditionally.
- Parents will make time to pray daily with and for their children.
- No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.
- Families will desire to do God's will.

It's difficult to be a good parent and raise children who love life and are faithful to God's plan. It's hard to know when to let them struggle and when to bail them out. It's tough to discern when letting them struggle might break their spirit and when protecting them might make them weak.

When my kids were growing up, I could easily identify the social pitfalls, emotional traps and academic snares waiting to take my children down. Knowing that my kids would have to face these issues day in and day out often made me anxious. I would lose sleep trying to decide if I should let them face these struggles and possibly fail or rescue them.

It was tough, but my husband and I decided to let our children face the world and its sufferings, just as Christ did. We insisted that the kids wear their bike helmets for their own safety even though no one else did. We made our son go to school and take a test for which he was unprepared because it was the morally right thing to do. And, we told our recent college graduate daughter that she couldn't come home if she quit her job just because she thought it was too hard. She needed to know that you don't quit when it gets tough.



Our kids were bullied for wearing bike helmets. Our son almost blew his perfect GPA. And our daughter did wrestle with her career choice. But, guess what? Letting our children work through these struggles was good for them. It was a key ingredient in the development of their social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual competence. It brought them closer to Christ and his suffering.

It may seem counterintuitive that crash and burn situations can be good for someone. It appears to run against the grain of what we are taught as parents; that

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

we have a primary responsibility to keep children away from harmful situations. Several studies confirm that kids benefit when they tussle with real life situations. Search Institute, a renowned research organization in the Twin Cities, confirms that children become more responsible, are more motivated to learn and become more successful adults when their parents allow them to struggle and fail.

Researchers at Boys Town in Omaha found that children who are sheltered from life's skirmishes remain dependent, find it near impossible to handle life's ups and down and strain to make critical decisions. They found that facing difficulties and working through them increases confidence, builds self-worth and leads to health and happiness as an adult.

Both of these groups also found that parents must be present to their children as they struggle. They should not walk away, letting the child work through the situation alone. Rather, parents should guide their offspring to the best solution, support them as they correct the circumstances and help them determine how to prevent the struggle in the future.

One more important point; parents should also remember to pray with and for their children when struggles occur. Nothing is more important than remembering to ask God to fortify you and your children when life becomes hard. Always turn to Him for guidance, wisdom and mercy.

Preparing for a Necessary Conversation about Handling Struggles

Parenting is a balancing act. How do you decide that it is best to step in and shelter? And how do you know when you should step aside and watch? Here are some guidelines that might help you out.

- Determine if the struggle will cause life-threatening or permanent damage to your child. If the harm will be irreparable, step in. If it won't, step aside.
- Will the struggle teach a character-building lesson or give them an opportunity to develop their virtue? Will it give them a chance to fall but pick themselves up and try again? Step aside and guide.
- Does the struggle and potential failure provide an opportunity to share decision making and personal control with your child? If it does, step aside.
- Does the struggle worry you or enflame *your* emotions? Are you stepping in to help because you want to soothe yourself or because you can help your child fix the situation yourself? If this is about you and your need to be in control, step aside.

Remember, your parental role is to be there as a guide on your child's side. Be there for them and help them work through the struggle and find the best outcome, especially by praying for them and asking God to keep you and them safe from impending injury and harm.

For more great ideas and guidance on how to talk with your kids about the struggles of life, view all of the Necessary Conversation webinars available at the Teaching the Way of Love website. Register at: twl4parents.com/necessary-conversations-webinar/.

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Please Pray That

- All affected by COVID-19 and other diseases will find healing and comfort in the Great Physician.
- Families will use this time of "social distancing" to grow closer together as a community of persons.
- Families will be true schools of love, where all family members become more Christlike.
- Parents will help their children foster respect for all people.
- Families will be safe places to learn how to handle conflict and challenges to relationships.
- Parents will have the strength to teach their children selfless generosity in a culture of selfishness.
- Our culture will reclaim the lost art of true friendship and civil respect.
- Families will foster an attitude of gratitude and contentment to combat the materialism of our culture.
- Parents will have the strength to selfless generosity in a culture of selfishness.

Volume 7, Issue 8

April, 2020

Necessary Conversations About the Importance of Community

Last Easter my wife, children, and I arrived at my parents' house after a harrowing, icy trip. We arrived to a dark house and a dark neighborhood. The power had gone out and the power company didn't think it would be back up for 24 hours or more. We had to finish Easter dinner on the gas grill. We ate by candlelight. After dinner we sat in the dark living room without lights or television. The loss of technology forced my children to join the family conversations. Without lights we couldn't even play board games like we usually do. We were forced just to talk. It was an adventurous Easter to be sure. And it was one our children will never forget. That little crisis forced our family to work and talk together and to be a community of persons.

As I write this, we are in the middle of another crisis. COVID-19 has all but shut down society. Schools are closed, as are most businesses. We aren't able to go to Stations of the Cross or even the Holy Mass. Our family has been forced together all day, every day for the past week, with at least weeks more to look forward to. It's too cold to spend much time outside. There's no place to go. We're literally stuck with each other.

While a pandemic is certainly a crisis, it may also be a God-given challenge to families to find ways to come together as a community. Sure, we get on each other's nerves. Yes, we get sick of each other. But we also have a wonderful opportunity. All of us are being forced to see that selfishness makes everyone around them miserable. We have been given the opportunity to combat self-centeredness and entitlement by living as members of a true community. This is an opportunity for our family. As parents we just need to seize it.

These extraordinary lessons are pretty rare, but they do happen. During this time of social distancing and enforced isolation, we also need to pay attention and teach **smaller** lessons in being a community of persons with our families at any time. Let me explain.

My children are both entering adolescence, and that means that they prefer to spend their time alone in their rooms. When I recall my own adolescence and my need for



solitude, I can understand why they want to be alone and discover the joys of introspection.

On the other hand, the family is the primary community and I want my children to learn to be contributing members of a community. The family is where they learn things like interdependence, the common good, and sacrifice for the sake of others. They can't learn those things if they are isolating themselves in their bedrooms.

Teaching Community during the COVID-19 Pandemic

My wife and I know that a balance needs to be found between the desire to be alone and the need to be together. That is why we do our best to combat the overwhelming attitude of entitlement among our children. We are constantly reminding them that they need to consider the needs of others, not just their own desires. At the same time, we guide our children towards the productive use of their 'solo' time by engaging them in spirited and lively conversations about real matters happening in their world and the one that surrounds them.

Necessary Conversations about Community

Build a more meaningful community of persons during this time of increased family togetherness. Here are a few suggestions that can lead to greater family intimacy, trust, and love.

- One of the most tried-and-true methods for building community in the family is to eat a family meal together every day (or as close to every day as you are able). Enjoying good food and good conversation together is relationship building. Use this time to practice meaningful conversation.
- Take the time to listen to your children as they tell you about your day. Talk to them about your own.
- Teach your children how to be members of a community – especially the community of your own family. While human beings are naturally social, community building is still a skill that needs to be learned and practiced. Challenge them to think of ways to add real value to your home during this time of increased family togetherness.
- Set boundaries that keep your children from isolating themselves. Finding that balance between necessary alone time and anti-social behavior can be difficult. At some point you need to get your children out of their bedrooms and into the family room. Setting limits on electronic device usage and social media is also very important.
- Create opportunities for your family to serve others in charity. Reach out to your neighbors to see if they need anything, especially in times of crisis. Challenge your children to find ways to use social media that allow them to exercise the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Help them to experience the needs of others in safe, meaningful ways.
- Foster family interdependence. Share daily chores (meal planning and preparation, cleaning and sanitizing). Give each family member a daily opportunity to reveal one thing that would make their day more joyful. Pray for and with each other at least once each day.

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Necessary
Conversations

Family
Togetherness



Teaching the Way of Love

because humanity passes by way of the family . . .

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 7

MAY, 2020

Togetherness: Blessing or Burden?

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- All families find ways to live together in peace and harmony.
- Parents will guide their children towards the development of respect, obedience, tolerance and forgiveness.
- Parents will share the truth about God's love clearly and with charity.
- Parents will correct their children's behavior without hardening their hearts.
- Parents will love their children in the same way that God does; selflessly, consistently, unconditionally.
- Parents will make time to pray daily with and for their children.
- No child (or parent) will ever find themselves beyond God's love and mercy.
- Families will reject selfishness and become selfless.

Intense family togetherness is not new. Think about families who hunker down during a tornado, hurricane, or national disaster. Think about those who vacation in an RV for a week. What about families who gather when a loved one approaches death?

But there is something different about what we are experiencing now. This situation feels different. It worries us. It makes us feel anxious or angry or annoyed. It tempts us to abandon our virtues and feed our vices. We give in to the idea that we can't bear this much longer.

Okay, folks. Let's take a collective breath and regain our sanity by recalling the following essential teachings of our Catholic faith. We can weather family togetherness. We can survive collective living by remembering God's plan for us as a community of persons.

Love is the central purpose of every family. Our faith teaches us that the mission of each family is to guard, reveal, and communicate love. God intends love to be the heart of your home. He wants love to be the primary motivator for all that you do. God does not want us to put worry, control, fear, or anything else in front of love. Love must be first. It has to be the family's central goal.



Love is a decision - not a feeling – to will the good of another. Authentic love focuses on what is best for the entire family. It shifts one's concerns towards a sense of common good and away from selfishness. True love motivates a family to act interdependently and to do what is necessary even when it doesn't feel good to do so.

Love requires sacrifice. The Scriptures are full of examples of love revealing itself through personal sacrifice and suffering. Living in community can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. Pope Saint John Paul II wrote that "(family togetherness) requires...a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to tolerance, to pardon to reconciliation. There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension, and conflict violently attack and at time moral wound a family's common good" (On the Family. #21).

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

God's mercy and grace help us love one another. Harmony in the home happens when we lean into God's help. We need to frequently pray *God, come to my assistance. Lord, make haste to help me!* God's grace and mercy keep us focused on the common good and strengthen us to live the virtues and conquer our vices.

Virtues overcome division and renew family harmony. Virtues are firm habits to do what is right and good. Bonding together as a family requires respect, obedience, tolerance, and forgiveness. These virtues can create a deep and rich bond of the family's spirit that links everyone together in a common mission of love.

Transforming family togetherness from a burden into a blessing begins with these foundational Catholic teachings. In order to see family closeness as a good you must believe that God's plan for the family is superior to any other cultural ideals. Let's consider some practical ways to do this.

Preparing for a Necessary Conversation about Family Togetherness

Translating God's teachings into everyday life involves the development of virtue and a commitment to turn to God for assistance when it is needed. Let's look at five central virtues that help a family reject selfish tendencies, overcome division and reestablish their unity.

RESPECT This virtue involves a deep admiration for someone elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements. Mutual respect can be shown by recognizing legitimate privacy for family members who need their space and by participating in activities with family members who need comradery. It is revealed in polite conversation, picking up after oneself and using manners.

OBEDIENCE This virtue gives due honor to authority and to treat those who are charged to exercise it with respect, gratitude and good-will. Obedience allows every family member to participate in the social life within the home. It can be developed by playing games where everyone has to adhere to the rules of the game or through the establishment of a chore list where everyone follows what is written.

TOLERANCE This virtue helps us endure hardship without adverse reaction. It helps the family respond in love when one of its members does something stupid or irritating. Tolerance reduces annoyance and it helps us to endure present evils without sadness or resentment in conformity with the will of God. It should be noted that tolerance is not the ability to withhold one's comments or to overlook something that is wrong. Family members who are tolerant also speak up and charitably correct each other.

FORGIVENESS This virtue is the ability to pardon someone who has offended you. Within the family, offenses will be both great and small. Withholding forgiveness often leads to great discord and division. But, offering forgiveness is the sure path towards unity and family peace. Family members should never tire of forgiving, nor asking for forgiveness. As Pope Francis often comments, the most important words spoken in a family are *I am sorry* and *I forgive you*.

Now that you have a better understanding of what to do to make your family togetherness a blessing, schedule a conversation with your family to discuss these virtues and how to put them into practice.

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Please Pray That

- God will put an end to the pandemic and lay His healing hands on His people.
- We may be able to come back to the Sacraments soon with a renewed love and respect for these fountains of grace.
- Families will make the most out of their time together to grow closer to each other and to grow in holiness together.
- Parents will have the support of the Holy Spirit as they hold “necessary conversations” with their children.
- Young people will embrace the truth of God’s plan for our happiness.

Volume 9, Issue 8

June, 2020

Necessary Conversations About the Art of Sacred Silence

My world is so quiet right now. As I sit at my keyboard writing this article, my children are sitting in the living room quietly working on their schoolwork. I just finished Morning Prayer, and my heart is filled with gratitude for this moment of serenity. Now, don’t get the idea that this peacefulness is normal for us. With two early teenagers in the house, even in times of forced solitude, our family life is noisy, chaotic, and quarrelous. But rare moments like these remind me of another **necessary conversation** to have with my children. I want to teach my children the value of using “sacred silence” to grow in holiness.

The time of forced quarantine we are experiencing right now has been a golden opportunity for silent reflection. Our days aren’t filled with the usual running around. We have fewer distractions in general. This is a great time to exercise the “art of sacred silence.” But opportunity only becomes advantage with conscious effort. So we need to seize this opportunity for ourselves, and teach our children to seize it as well.

The Art of Sacred Silence

Of course, the goal isn’t just to be quiet. Catholic tradition gives us four ways to practice the art of sacred silence in order to develop what we call our “interior life.”

Thinking/reflecting: It is good just to stop and think about our lives and the world around us. It’s important to especially consider the meaning and purpose of things in your life.

Introspection: Thinking about your own life is an extremely important part of growing in holiness. Again, the focus of introspection is meaning and purpose. Why do I feel this way? Why do these thoughts go through my head? Why do I desire these things?



Teach Your Children the Value of
Silent Reflection & Discernment

Prayer: Lifting our hearts and minds to God in order to grow in intimacy with the Holy Trinity is one of the keys of Catholic life.

Discernment: Discernment is the culmination and combination of introspection and prayer. It means listening to the various “voices,” desires, drives, and motivations in your life, discerning where they’re coming from (God, Satan, your best self, your sinful self), and seeking God’s path for you.

Having Necessary Conversations About Discernment

So how exactly do we exercise the art of silence and teach our children to do the same? What exactly do we think about? Here is an exercise in discernment to give you and your children a start:

1. We are created VERY good

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that when God created humanity, He declared it VERY good. This isn’t only true of humanity, it’s true of every single person. Reflect on what is **good** in you. What strengths do you have in your personality and character? What natural talents did God create you with? What spiritual gifts has the Holy Spirit blessed you with? How has grace worked in your life?

2. We are fallen

While we are created good - and retain that goodness - we are also fallen. Original Sin has damaged our personalities, made us more prone to sin, and disordered us in various ways. It can be especially difficult to reflect on our fallenness. It’s so negative! But it is necessary for us to know how we are fallen in order to take the next step - answering Jesus’ call to healing and conversion. What sins do you commit? Which sins have become habitual (i.e. turned into vices)? Which of your vices might be your root sin? Your root sin is the main disordered desire that tends to shape your life and your choices. We all have disordered hearts. Specifically, we each have an “Original Wound.” What is your Original Wound - what are you actually seeking in most of your sins? It could be something like fear of rejection (not feeling worthy), feeling of abandonment (not feeling loved), helplessness, fear, or distrust.

3. We are called

Exploring how we are wounded and how we sin is an important exercise of the interior life. That’s why the Church gives us the examination of conscience and the deeper “Examen” of Saint Ignatius. But as Catholics we know that our fallenness is not the end of the story. We know that while we are still sinners, Jesus calls us to healing, redemption, transformation, and holiness. That call is our next area of reflection. How is God calling you to cooperate with grace in order to heal and transform your heart? What kind of person do you think God is calling you to become? Realizing that Jesus’ main call to us is to follow Him in radical love, in what ways might He be calling you to grow in selflessness, self-sacrifice, and care for others? More specifically, Jesus calls each of us to a specific vocation as our particular “school of love.” Young people need to spend time praying about and pondering how they are called to love and to serve. Adults need to do the same, but thinking about how they are called to take their vocation to the next level - to love even more deeply and radically.

That’s a lot to think about! But if you’re having regular “necessary conversations” with your children, you’ve already been preparing them for this kind of reflection and discernment. Each topic that we’ve covered this year is something that leads us away from God’s plan for our lives. Talking about these issues leads us all to stop and think about our lives. That’s the goal of these “necessary conversations.” So keep talking with your children. Keep encouraging them to reflect and discern God’s will for their lives. And keep leading them to become holy and happy adults, living in God’s loving plan.

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