

Confirmation - How can we help our young people to grow in faith?

1. **Role model** - not so much by what we say as what we do. Our lives need to show that God and faith are important cornerstones in life. We need to be able to talk about our faith, what it means to us, even how we sometimes struggle.
2. **Prayer** - faith is rooted in a relationship with God and no relationship can survive without communication. As parents we need to find ways for our families to pray together and individually.
3. **Wholeness** - that God is part of all of life, not just the explicitly "holy" bits.
4. **Part of the Christian community** - the confirmed person is invited to take on a more mature role within the Christian community. We need to be part of that faith community, part of the liturgical life of the community, praying and celebrating together so mass matters! We also need to find new ways to help our young people feel part of the local Christian community. That sense of belonging and identity are important foundations for people to grow into a mature, adult faith. It can be hard to get out on a Sunday morning. It can be harder still to take any younger children with us. But it is about building strong foundations. We are people of habit, whether it is Coronation Street or chips on a Friday night. So too with our faith we need to be people of habit. What we do regularly becomes part of who we are. Like bringing a first child home from hospital - contrast that with bringing the third or fourth home. It becomes instinctive and never leaves us, so too with faith. And we don't need to feel that we have it all sussed. We can come with our struggles, our questions, we come as who we are and that is what God wants.
5. **Christian witness** - how I live in the world is affected by the reality that I am a Christian. Our children need to see that as parents our values, choices and actions are shaped by a living faith.
 - How we care for each other
 - How we care for those who are deprived, oppressed, exploited
 - What vision we have of how the world should be
 - How we care for the earth on which we live
6. **Help our young people to find ways to live out their call to be Christian witnesses.** Encourage that outward orientation, that awareness of the needs and desires of others. It may be something within the parish but it does not need to be explicitly religious - Shoebox, MS Readathon, recycling etc. What matters is that they are looking beyond themselves and giving of their time and energy. This active involvement is a real responsibility for all who are confirmed - both within parish and in the wider community.

The challenge this sacrament puts before us is - Who do we want our children to be in the world? Do we want them to be people of faith, people who desire to make a difference? If that is how we want our children to be then that is how we must be ourselves. If we don't lead how will our young people follow?

But remember if it all seems too daunting, the gifts of the Spirit - are there for the asking, for our children and for each of us.

Pointers for Prayer

One of the most important things about prayer is "pray as you can not as you can't". In other words when you try a few different ways of prayer find one that you feel comfortable with. Don't force yourself - or anybody else - to pray in a particular way. If you can pray as a family that is great. But it may be that different people are comfortable with different ways of praying. This is especially true of young people. The important thing is to foster an atmosphere of prayer in your family so that each person is encouraged to make prayer part of their day.

Make the connection: We are coming up to Lent. This is a great opportunity to develop a few good habits, like prayer. Why not link into the work Trócaire is doing? Find something that you as a family could give up for Lent, such as desserts, and put the money saved into the Trócaire box. Use the grace before meals that is printed on the Trócaire box, praying it together before dinner. You will be growing in prayer and in awareness of justice issues.

Stop, look, learn : Take some time at the end of the day, whether alone or with your partner and/or children. Maybe light a candle. Each think back over the day and then answer the questions

- What has made you happy today?
- What has made you sad, cross or sorry today?

By becoming more reflective in this way we tune in more to the joys and challenges of life. It can help us to be more thankful for all that is good and more capable of dealing with the challenges.

Light a candle, become quiet and still. Name one issue or person you are praying for. Maybe finish with a prayer like Our Father or Angel of God.

Praying with scripture. Just sitting and reading a piece from the Gospel is a great way to get familiar with God's word. Children's bibles make the stories easy to understand. For something more have a look at either of these good web-sites

- www.sacredspace.ie
- www.CatholicIreland.net

Veritas, on the Main St in Letterkenny also have a great range of books for parents and for children. One you might want to read is "Promises to Keep; Parents and Confirmation" by John Paul Sheridan. A bible or book of the Gospels is a nice gift for any child at Confirmation.

Let your kids know that you will pray for them as they prepare for their Confirmation. Help them to feel special and important.

And remember, Lent is a great time to start something good and keep it going!