



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

*A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania*

## A Guide to Catholic Parenting: CATHOLIC PARENTS MODEL SERVICE

A marker-moment in the rite of Baptism occurred when the celebrant anointed you with holy oil (Chrism) and said, “As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always...” For you this vocational call is exponentially charged since, as “primary teacher,” you are responsible to form your child to understand and embrace this same vocation. This newsletter focuses on how parents can imitate Jesus in the Christ-role of **SERVANT-KING**.

Baptism makes us heirs of heaven and gives us a share in the royal mission of Jesus. He came to restore all people to God. He invited all into his kingdom, and he assumed the role of **servant-king**. Jesus told us that he “did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45). He explained to his disciples that the world defines greatness as power and control over others, but that it could not be that way with them if they wanted to be his disciples. Instead, he said, “whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant” (Mt. 20:26). He washed the feet of his apostles and then taught: “If I, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn.13: 14-15).

As servant-kings we are called to give service to each other with the mindset of Jesus. Some ways to imitate Jesus, the servant-king include:

- anticipating the needs of others
- sacrificing personal time and preference for the good of another
- expressing appreciation and gratitude
- contributing to the organization of the home
- cultivating the joy of giving
- experiencing the life of service that is expressed in the Peace Prayer of St. Francis: “let me sow love, pardon, faith, hope, light, joy, understanding, consolation.”

### Practice the Works of Mercy

The “Works of Mercy” are basic charitable actions that aid others in **physical** ways, such as *feeding the hungry and visiting the sick* or in **spiritual** ways such as *counseling the doubtful*.

When these goals are demonstrated in behaviors, love becomes visible. The *corporal works of mercy* implore us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, help those imprisoned, shelter the homeless, care for the sick, and bury the dead. The *spiritual works of mercy* encourage us to counsel the sinner, share knowledge of God with others, advise the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and for the dead.

Teach both the literal and the creative sense of each Work of Mercy. Take, for example, “Feed the Hungry.”

- In a **literal sense** it could translate into serving at a food kitchen, donating money to a food collection, contributing canned goods to a food bank, supporting legislation to stock food pantries, deciding to give up desserts and giving the saved money to the poor . . .
- In **the creative sense** it could mean phoning a shut-in who is hungry for conversation, inviting to a play date a child who is unpopular/hungry for belonging, sending a homemade greeting card to a grandparent who is lonely/hungry for companionship, speaking affirming words to someone who is starved for attention.

### **Demonstrate a Commitment to Social Justice**

Justice, care for the poor, and reverence for human dignity are core elements of the Gospel of Jesus. Personal commitment to social justice is, therefore, an essential part of identifying with the attitudes of Christ “who emptied himself and took on the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). Engage children in applying the principles of *Catholic Social Teaching*: (1) Life and Dignity of the Human Person, (3) Call to Family, Community, and Participation, (3) Rights and Responsibilities of the Human Person, (4) Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, (5) Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers, (6) Solidarity of the Human Family, and (7) Care for God’s Creation.

- Post a work of mercy or principle of Catholic social teaching. Make it the focus of conversation once a week at dinner.
- Perform a family social justice service project each semester.
- Think of ways to teach sharing, empathy, forgiveness, compassion, repentance, etc.

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