



Nurturing the Domestic Church: Catholic Children's Faith Formation in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: This study examines Catholic children's faith education during the Covid-19 pandemic, a period when parish-based catechesis and communal worship were largely suspended. The research aimed to explore how faith formation continued within families, identify those responsible, determine when it should be given, and assess its urgency. Using a qualitative method, data were collected through in-depth, systematic interviews with some participants representing parents, Church leaders, catechists, and children, supported by relevant Church documents and literature. Findings reveal that the family assumed a central role as the "school of faith," providing simple catechesis through prayer, Marian devotion, and modeling Christian living. Key practices included teaching basic prayers, creating a conducive prayer environment, monitoring children's faith growth with love, and fostering unity with the universal Church through online worship. Adequate facilities, such as internet access and prayer spaces, were essential for effective faith formation. However, challenges arose from parents' work demands, limited time, economic constraints, and lack of resources. The study concludes that sustaining children's faith during crises requires intentional parental involvement, pastoral support, and collaboration between family and Church. Strengthening the domestic Church is vital to ensuring that Catholic children grow as committed members of the Body of Christ in any context.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic came like a giant tsunami wave, sweeping through every part of human life—economic, social, religious, and cultural. It made no distinction between rich and poor, leaders and ordinary citizens, and crossed national borders without the need for a passport. To stop the spread of the virus, countries around the world went into lockdown, closing public spaces and limiting social interaction. Medical workers faced great challenges in treating those infected, and societies had to adapt to what became known as the "new normal." This new reality changed the way people think, speak, act, and live their faith.

For the Catholic Church, the pandemic had a direct impact on children's faith education. Regular church activities, including catechism classes and Sunday School, were stopped. Even attending Mass in person was not allowed for children, cutting them off from one of the main sources of faith formation. This is a serious concern because the maturity of the Church's faith in the future depends on building a strong foundation for children now. Without proper faith education, the Church risks having a weaker generation of believers.

The urgency of this issue is clear. The Second Vatican Council, in its document *Gravissimum Educationis*, emphasizes that young people must receive continuous faith formation, regardless of the times and circumstances. The family, as the “domestic church,” and the local parish community share a responsibility to nurture children’s faith. If faith is not formed well from an early age, the results will be poor. But if it is nurtured from the start, the Church will grow strong and mature. The pandemic has become a test of the Church’s creativity and commitment in finding ways to continue faith education despite restrictions.

While many studies have examined the impact of the pandemic on education in general, very few have focused specifically on Catholic children’s faith education during Covid-19. There is a lack of research that looks at this topic from different perspectives—families, Church leaders, children’s ministry teachers, and the children themselves. This study aims to fill that gap by using interviews with ten people from different backgrounds, along with a review of existing literature, to understand the urgency, responsibility, timing, and continuity of children’s faith education during the pandemic.

From this background, the study is guided by four key questions: (1) How has children’s Catholic faith education continued during the pandemic? (2) Who is responsible for children’s faith education? (3) When should this education take place? and (4) Why is children’s faith education so urgent?

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research method with systematic interviews as the primary approach. An interview is a dialogue between two or more people with a specific purpose. In this case, the dialogue took place in a reciprocal manner: the interviewer asked questions, and the interviewee provided answers.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with various sources to explore the reality of Catholic children’s faith education. The interviewees included: Regina Renda, a trader from St. Michael Parish, Elopada, Southwest Sumba; Kak Tina, a children’s ministry leader from St. Paul Parish, Bojonegoro; Alexander John Matthew Wibowo, a high school student from SMAK St. Louis 2, Surabaya.

In addition to the interviews, this study also reviewed relevant literature to support and enrich the findings. This included previous research by Karolina Bikan in her undergraduate thesis, *Kesadaran Orang Tua Akan Pentingnya Pendidikan Iman Anak Dalam Keluarga Katolik* (“Parents’ Awareness of the Importance of Faith Education for Children in Catholic Families”), Universitas Sanata Dharma (2006), as well as Church documents such as *Amoris Laetitia* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of Love) and *Christus Vivit* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christ is Alive*).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Covid-19 brought impacts to all communities, including the smallest community—the family. Families were no longer free to take part in Catholic religious lessons or children’s faith

formation programs that were usually carried out together with catechists in the parish or local chapel. In such uncertain conditions, the role of the family in educating their children in the faith became very central. Catholic families have a moral responsibility to nurture their children for the growth and development of their faith. Supporting this, Regina Renda stated in an interview that one effective way to teach children during the pandemic is through short catechesis.

Catechesis is the teaching of the faith directed to Catholics—especially children, young people, and adults—so that they can understand their faith more deeply. Faith education is given because all Christians have the right to receive Christian education. This teaching is official, following the norms of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). However, families often give catechesis to children in an unofficial way. Even though it is informal, it does not reduce its value, provided that what is taught to children is faithful to the true Catholic faith—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Parents' creativity is absolutely necessary so that children have an interest in learning and practicing their faith.

Catechesis for children has a distinctive way of making the faith taught easy to understand and part of their daily lives. This was experienced by Alexander, a student who felt grateful to have received faith formation from his parents and family since early childhood. A good understanding of the faith in childhood becomes an important element for faith growth in later years. Errors in teaching faith will influence how a child views religion when they are adults. Therefore, parents must first have correct and solid knowledge so that they do not make mistakes in educating their children. Parents can use official Catholic teaching books as a guide, one of which is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The essential elements of children's faith education include teaching them to know and worship God, to love others, and to live the faith they have received in baptism. In practical terms, this begins with introducing basic prayers. The first is the Sign of the Cross. The Catholic Church begins and ends every prayer with the Sign of the Cross: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen." When saying this prayer, certain gestures are made: the fingers of the right hand touch the forehead while saying "In the name of the Father," then move down to the chest while saying "and of the Son," then cross to the left shoulder saying "and of the Holy Spirit," and finally to the right shoulder saying "Amen." When teaching this, parents are expected to demonstrate it directly, with respect and reverence.

The second is the Creed ("I Believe"), in its short or long form. This prayer contains the mystery of God's salvation through His Son, who became human, and professes belief in the Holy Trinity. Since this is central to the Catholic faith, teaching it to children should be done carefully and accurately. Parents should not be afraid of making mistakes and therefore avoid teaching; instead, they are challenged to deepen their own faith so they can explain it well. Openness to Church leaders or priests is also important so that faith formation continues well, even if done at home.

The third is the Lord's Prayer (*Our Father*), which is important in the Catholic Church because it was given directly by Jesus (cf. Mt 6:9). This prayer has three main elements: giving

thanks and praise to God the Father, building good relationships with others by forgiving them, and asking to be freed from evil. The Church considers this prayer so important that it is required for catechumens preparing to become Catholic, and in the Mass it is prayed as the prayer that completes all petitions. Children, as the future of the Church, need to know the *Our Father* well.

Educating and forming children's faith through prayer is not easy, but it can be done. This was expressed by Regina Renda and agreed by her husband: parents must persevere in training children continuously, for example by having them memorize prayers regularly, so that these prayers become part of their daily lives. Still, parents face challenges, as experienced by Monica, a vocational high school teacher. She said, in Javanese: "*Lah piye mane Frater, wes tak ajari tapi yo angel, opo mene di'e wes capek les-lesan. Mari ngono turu*" ("What else can I do, Brother? I've already taught her, but it's difficult, especially since she's tired from extra lessons. After that, she just sleeps").

Fourth, educating a child's faith includes teaching them to honor Mary, the Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church. When Jesus was on the Cross, He said to the beloved disciple, "Here is your mother," and from that moment the disciple took her into his home (Jn 19:27). The beloved disciple represents the Church, which received Mary as the Mother of the Church. Mary's role in the work of salvation makes her a special example for all members of the Church, and it is fitting that we follow her example. One way to honor Mary is by praying the *Hail Mary* (or other Marian devotions). A helpful way to encourage children to pray this is to place a statue of Mary in a dignified spot in the home.

Short catechesis of this kind helps children to grow in their spiritual life. The pandemic need not diminish a child's religious spirit; on the contrary, it can strengthen the bond between parents and children as they pray together in a free and sincere way. A child's success in making catechesis and prayer a part of their daily life is greatly influenced by the support and encouragement given by their parents.

The Family as a School of Faith

A child grows and develops first within the small circle of the family, before entering the wider circle of society. In the family, the child receives informal knowledge that shapes their way of thinking, speaking, and acting. Everything parents do—whether consciously or unconsciously—is recorded in the child's mind and becomes a guide for their future actions. For example, when a mother cleans the living room to keep it neat and comfortable, the child may not fully understand her purpose, but this action already shapes the child's perception of the living room and the value of cleanliness.

Informal and practical education is gained by children through the activities of their parents and family members. In spiritual life, a child will first imitate what their parents do, motivated by trust. This trust leads them to copy the activities of their parents or close relatives. Spiritual life grows in children because of their parents' example—visiting a Marian grotto, praying together as a family, or practicing small habits such as saying grace before meals. For instance,

Alexander, a young boy, prays before and after meals simply because he has seen his parents do so. Over time, parents should explain the meaning of such actions—such as giving thanks to God for providing food—so that children develop a proper understanding of what they do and believe.

In this sense, the “school of faith” means that parents are actively involved in teaching and practicing the faith together with their children. A child will not naturally pray before studying unless it is taught and modeled by parents or close family. Like a formal school, a Catholic family has its own way of living the faith. For example, a father may gather his wife and children to pray the Rosary in front of a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Such actions are both teaching and practicing the faith together. Spiritual practices also require discipline in time and place so that children develop good habits. Continued involvement is essential so that these patterns become part of the child’s life into adulthood.

The uncertainty of the pandemic has meant that families work and worship from home. Although Covid-19 has affected all aspects of life, spiritual life in the family must not be neglected. On the contrary, the family as a school of faith can strengthen the household’s spiritual life. If families have previously paid little attention to children’s faith formation, this is the right time to provide knowledge and practice of the faith—correcting prayer mistakes, setting a good example, and encouraging regular devotion. However, forcing children into religious practice without readiness can cause stress and reduce the meaning of faith education. Each Catholic family is encouraged to apply the best approach for its circumstances so that children willingly and naturally imitate their parents’ prayer life.

Providing Adequate Online Learning Facilities

The pandemic forced people to work, study, and worship from home. Following the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and government directives, everyone had to maintain physical distance, wash hands regularly, and wear masks. Churches, schools, campuses, and government offices were closed to slow the spread of Covid-19. People did not remain idle; they sought creative ways to continue economic, educational, and religious activities as part of the effort to sustain life.

Regarding spiritual life and children’s faith formation during the pandemic, families can provide facilities to help children continue participating in Church activities. These include a suitable prayer space at home that fosters a prayerful atmosphere when attending online Mass. Families can arrange an appropriate setting so that children can follow parish spiritual activities via YouTube or other online platforms. To do this, they need access to a phone, television, or laptop/computer, along with sufficient internet data. All of these are possible when the family is attentive to the child’s faith development.

Monitoring the Child’s Faith Development (Without Judging)

A child’s faith development can be observed through their attitude and actions in spiritual life. The measure is whether they practice Church activities and prayer not because they are

forced by their parents, but because it comes from the heart. Parents have a moral responsibility to monitor this development and to correct mistakes in the practice of faith. This responsibility should be carried out with love, without becoming a burden to the child. Through this approach, parents will be able to see whether their child's faith is growing or stagnant.

Monitoring a child's faith does not mean giving formal tests or grading their spiritual life. It is not about judging but about guiding and correcting. Every small step of progress should be appreciated. A judgmental attitude will limit the child's freedom to express their faith. Instead, parents should give the right understanding so that the child becomes responsible for their own actions.

Fostering a Habit of Worship Within the Unity of the Universal Church

The Catholic Church is universal, meaning that its members are united across the world, regardless of geography. Wherever it is present, the Church has the same structure of worship, although languages may differ. In biblical imagery, Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, and we are the Body. This metaphor expresses the unity of faith that connects all Catholics. Such unity should be nurtured from an early age through faith education—for example, attending Mass or other parish activities.

During the pandemic, physical gatherings became difficult, and children missed out on experiencing the unity of worship with the wider Church. Yet unity among members strengthens faith and encourages spiritual growth, especially through shared encounters. These meetings with other members of the Church help people face trials and challenges in faith. Building this unity requires personal commitment and participation in opportunities facilitated by the Church. In this study, one example of fostering unity during the pandemic was the practice of praying the Rosary together online.

Challenges in Catholic Children's Faith Education

Faith education for Catholic children in the family faces many challenges. These existed even before the pandemic, but Covid-19 made them worse. The first challenge is that parents are often busy with work and have little time to guide their children. The demands of earning a living leave parents unable to give sufficient attention to faith formation, even if they care about it. Many participants in this study faced this same issue. One parent who works as a trader explained: "I don't have time to guide my child because I have to focus on my work. If I stop working, we won't have money for food that day." Parents face a real dilemma between two equally important responsibilities.

Even when families work, study, and worship from home, this does not automatically improve children's faith formation. One parent, a teacher, said she was so busy preparing lessons and assignments for her school that she had no time to guide her child's faith. This is an urgent problem because children's faith education is being neglected. Parents cannot be forced, but they must be made aware of their responsibility for their child's spiritual needs.

Another challenge revealed in this study is the lack of adequate facilities to support faith formation. Some families lack a proper prayer space, internet data, a mobile phone, or a computer—resources that are especially important during the pandemic. While parents want to provide the best for their children, they are sometimes unable to do so because of economic hardship. They understand the importance of faith formation, but feel powerless in the face of financial struggles, business downturns, and job losses caused by Covid-19.

CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly challenged Catholic children's faith education, shifting the primary responsibility to the family as the "school of faith." In the absence of regular parish-based catechesis and communal worship, parents have become the central agents of faith formation, modeling prayer, devotion, and Christian living within the home. Simple catechesis—teaching basic prayers, honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary, and creating a prayerful atmosphere—has proven effective in nurturing children's spiritual life, while also strengthening family bonds through shared religious practices.

However, the research findings show that successful faith formation requires intentionality, adequate facilities, and sustained parental involvement. Families that provide prayer spaces, access to online liturgies, and consistent spiritual guidance are better able to help children integrate faith into daily life. Monitoring a child's faith growth with love, rather than judgment, fosters a sense of personal responsibility and freedom in religious expression.

Despite these efforts, several challenges remain. Economic pressures, limited time due to work demands, and inadequate resources hinder parents' ability to fully engage in their children's spiritual development. These issues, intensified by the pandemic, highlight the need for greater pastoral support, practical resources, and creative strategies from the Church to empower families in their catechetical role. Ultimately, sustaining the faith of the next generation will depend on a collaborative effort between the family, parish, and wider Church community, ensuring that even in times of crisis, children grow as active, committed members of the Body of Christ.

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