



Children's Faith Development through Faith Formation Activities

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Abstract: Children, being precious assets and the future hope of the Church, warrant special attention for their faith development. The Church employs Faith Formation activities as one of its initiatives, constituting a form of child catechesis seamlessly integrated as a continuation of parental formation. This article elucidates the Church's approach to nurturing children's faith through Faith Formation activities, organized by parishes with the assistance of adept coaches. Utilizing the literature review method, this article explores relevant articles and journals. The findings underscore that faith education takes center stage in children's lives, with Faith Formation activities serving as an ongoing endeavor to foster and cultivate their faith. The significance of a lively and enjoyable atmosphere in these activities proves pivotal in enhancing children's participation and engagement, shaping them into virtuous children of God. The central query posited in the article is, "How can Faith Formation activities be made interesting and enjoyable for Catholic children in the Parish?" The article's insights emphasize that the key lies in the creativity and skill of the coaches. Strategies such as incorporating games, stories, drama, and art activities contribute to creating a captivating learning environment, enabling children to develop their faith, recognize Jesus, and emulate his teachings. In conclusion, this article underscores the indispensable role of enjoyable and engaging Faith Formation activities in shaping the faith foundation of Catholic children in the Parish. The Church's dedicated efforts through these activities aim to ensure that children not only grow in faith but also develop solid character, preparing them as a generation committed to a spiritual life.

INTRODUCTION

Faith education is one of the efforts of the Church to foster the faith of its congregation. For the Church, children represent the future and hope of the Church (Alicia & Jizelle, 2023). In the Gospel itself, Jesus is portrayed as paying attention to little children. This can be seen from His teachings that make little children a model of humility, innocence, honesty, and surrender to God. Even Jesus rebuked His disciples who hindered children from coming to Him (cf. Matt 19:13-14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16).

In the effort to develop the faith of children, the Church organizes faith-building activities. Faith Formation activities themselves are events organized by parishes to develop the faith of children. In her article, Viktoria Res states that Faith Formation encompasses all activities carried out for the development of children's faith, both within the family and the community (Res et al., 2021). The term Faith Formation itself varies in each parish. There are

several terms for Children's Faith Formation commonly used in Indonesia, such as Sunday School, Joyful Sunday, Happy Saturday, Children's Faith Formation (CFF), Catholic Children's Faith Formation (CCFF), or *Sekami*. These different terms ultimately refer to catechesis activities organized by parishes. In faith-building activities, Catholic children learn, play, and develop their spiritual and religious aspects within the framework of Catholic faith formation.

Faith Formation activities serve as an advanced stage of faith formation within the family. The family is the primary and essential place for nurturing and developing a child's faith (Nampar, 2018). Faith formation and education for children even become one of the goals of Catholic marriage, requiring parents to nurture their children's faith in accordance with the teachings of the Church. Children receive the fundamentals of faith from their parents. Furthermore, an individual's faith will develop through encounters outside the family environment.

Faith Formation activities always aim at the goal of faith formation itself, which is for the child's faith to grow and be expressed in attitudes, behaviors, and insights (Sipayung & Pius X, 2023). Children's Faith Formation is an activity that involves creativity, collaboration, Catholic religious instruction, and enjoyable and fun games. Through these activities, children learn to understand the messages of Christ and the teachings of the Catholic faith conveyed in various forms familiar to children, such as games, stories, art, and various other creative activities. Faith Formation activities generally include prayer, reading of Scripture, movement and songs, creativity, games, and explanations of Faith Formation materials (Derung & Mandonza, 2021).

Faith Formation activities have a facilitator. The facilitator plays a crucial role in ensuring that children can internalize their faith according to their age. The facilitator's duties include accompanying children, creating a joyful atmosphere, and leading children to get closer to Jesus. A faith facilitator must be adept, skilled, creative, love children, be willing to serve, and have adequate knowledge and spiritual experience (Derung & Mandonza, 2021).

The focus of this research is on enjoyable Faith Formation activities. The problem statement to be elaborated in this article is "How to make Faith Formation activities interesting and enjoyable for Catholic children in the Parish?"

METHOD

This article employs a literature review method. Literature review is a specific research approach that generates new knowledge about a particular topic by examining literature sources, such as books, scholarly articles, journals, print media, and other relevant sources related to the discussed topic (Pradana et al., 2021). The data obtained are from various scholarly articles from previous research that are relevant to the topic discussed in this article.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The early stages of child development occur within the age range of 0-10 years. During this period, children undergo physical, psychological, and skills and talents development. Each

child has unique characteristics. Generally, children experience three aspects of development: biological, psychological, and didactic (Oktarisma et al., 2021). Another source states that there are five aspects of child development: physical-motor, cognition, socio-emotional, language, and moral-religious (Khaulani et al., 2020).

The age of 2-6 years is referred to as early childhood. During this period, children still depend on their parents for learning, playing, engaging in activities, and more. The dependency on parents continues until the end of early childhood. During this time, children become familiar with and interact with their environment (Khadijah et al., 2022). Regarding religious aspects, children aged 2-6 years are still in the stage of imitating religious movements and habits performed by adults around them.

Children aged 6-11 years can express their emotions, showing diverse emotional responses, often expressed through behavior. On the cognitive side, children at primary school age show a decrease in egocentricity, development of logical thinking skills, but still utilize concrete thinking concepts (Wulandari et al., 2024). However, in terms of moral-religious development, children aged 6-11 years have limitations because their cognitive abilities are not yet capable of comprehending complex moral understanding. At this stage, children still struggle to distinguish between good and bad.

In the later stages of childhood, children need to achieve physical development through play. They also begin to express themselves, interact with peers, learn gender roles, master basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, develop concepts, values, morals, and conscience. Additionally, they start forming attitudes towards groups and social institutions (Oktarisma et al., 2021).

Parents play a crucial role in influencing the religious development of children (Suyuti, 2022), as from birth to school age, children, along with their parents, serve as the primary educators within the family. Parents are responsible for providing basic education, including guiding the religious life of their children. Children receive the fundamentals of faith from their parents, both orally and visually, through parental role modeling. The spiritual development of children is generally based on fear of punishment, admiration for specific figures based on received stories, and their own imaginative inputs.

The child's surrounding environment also significantly influences their religious life. Children growing up in an environment that emphasizes spiritual life tend to have similar tendencies. This occurs because children develop through observation (Anisyah et al., 2023). The child's religious perception forms in conjunction with their proximity to their environment.

The Church organizes Faith Formation activities as a form of catechesis for children in parishes, communities, and stations. This activity serves as a platform for the development of faith for Catholics, especially children, with the aim of helping them love Jesus more and understand the teachings of the Catholic Church (Saraswati, 2020). With the hope that the development of children's faith will make them committed Catholics, through Faith Formation activities, children can mature in their Christian faith. The better the faith education they receive, the better the conditions in their surrounding society (Paska et al., 2016).

Faith Formation activities are an implementation of Gravissimum Educationis art. 4, which emphasizes that catechetical education is a special part of education, especially in matters of faith. According to CIC can. 777, parishes are obliged to organize catechesis for children, youth, and adults for faith development. Faith Formation activities in parishes are a manifestation of this directive. Although CIC can. 774 emphasizes that all members of the Church, especially parents, are responsible for nurturing the faith of children, Faith Formation activities remain a form of support and complement in the task of educating children in faith.

Parents are acknowledged as the primary faith nurturers (Paska et al., 2016). In the family, they provide early faith guidance and exhibit attitudes that reflect faith in Christ. However, as children age, parents need assistance in educating their children in faith, especially due to increased interactions with the surrounding environment and peers. Therefore, Faith Formation activities are organized as a continuous effort involving children in learning while playing and having fun in a peer community.

CONCLUSION

Nurturing faith is the Church's effort to educate Catholic children to have a strong faith, considering them as the hope and future of the Church. The significance of nurturing faith lies in the role and responsibility of parents as the primary environment for children to grow and develop. The Church also contributes to developing the faith of children through Faith Formation activities, providing a space for catechesis in an enjoyable atmosphere. The uniqueness of these activities lies in the uplifting atmosphere, and therefore, a facilitator must be able to create a comfortable, safe, engaging, and uplifting environment for children.

To meet these demands, a facilitator needs to employ various methods, games, creativity, as well as facilities and props, including technological media. The skills and expertise of the facilitator in managing activities are crucial keys in achieving the goal of making Faith Formation a enjoyable and memorable experience for children. Furthermore, a successful facilitator must also have a spiritual closeness to Christ, adequate knowledge of faith, the ability to love and be loved by children, and a good understanding of children's preferences and needs.

This conclusion emphasizes that the success of enjoyable Faith Formation activities depends not only on technical aspects but also on the spiritual and emotional dimensions of the facilitator's role. Thus, this article directs attention to the importance of a holistic approach in shaping positive religious experiences for Catholic children.

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