

# Nurture your child in faith

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the first article in a monthly series devoted to helping parents raise their children in the faith.

If Maura Sweeney had her way, "Happy Baptismal Day!" would be a greeting we exchange with each other as often as we do "Happy Birthday!"

That's how important the Catholic faith is to Sweeney, pastoral associate at St. Dominic Parish in Shortsville. An infant's baptism should be something we celebrate annually with as much fuss as one's birthday. But raising a child in the faith involves much more than celebrating his or her baptism, she noted.

"We can't teach what we don't do," Sweeney said, adding that parents have to nurture their own prayer lives first before they can begin to ponder passing on the faith to their newly baptized children.

As for their children, Sweeney, a mother herself, offered a number of tips to help parents instill a sense of God in their charges. For example, she said, a parent could make the sign of the cross on a baby's forehead three times, saying "Mommy loves you, Daddy loves you, and God loves you."

As the child grows, parents could introduce their child to prayer by teaching them to pray to their guardian angel, she said. She added that parents should teach their children both traditional prayers, such as the Our Father, and more spontaneous methods of prayer, such as drawing pictures with a religious theme. It's also important to pray during mealtimes, and on both secular and religious holidays. Prayers can also be part of celebrating such milestones in a child's life as learning how to ride a bike, she said.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Steven and Janice Leonardo watch as their daughter, Emma Marie, is baptized Feb. 16 by Father Michael Schramel, pastor of St. Ambrose Church in Rochester.

When it comes to taking the child to Mass, Sweeney advised setting an upbeat tone, and bringing a "Mass bag" with a rosary, children's picture Bible and other religious items for them to see.

"Answer their questions about Mass during Mass," she said. "If you don't know the answer, promise to ask the priest with them after Mass."

Children can be introduced to the concept of Christian service by having them help you around the house or by helping you pick a gift for a parish's giving tree during Advent. Children also learn about service by visiting elderly relatives or friends who are sick and/or shut-in, Sweeney said. In the end, giving a child the seeds of faith at an early age will eventually pay off in a blossoming of their own personal experience of God, she noted.

"Keep it simple, and keep it in their experience," Sweeney said. "Children seem to have a great deal of natural yearning for God."



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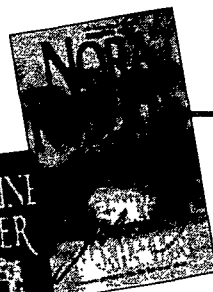
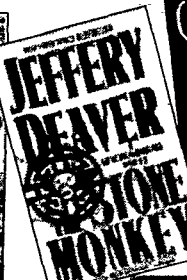
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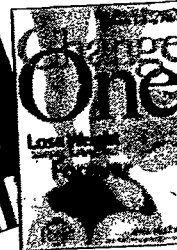
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