

Dear [insert names],

What are your hopes and dreams for your child? I am sure you have many hopes for your child. From the moment you knew you were expecting, you began to think about your child's future and the place he or she has within your family. Your baby is a wonderful blessing, and a big responsibility. In this year of change and adjustment, growth and joy, you will make many important decisions for yourself and your child. Among the many choices and decisions you will face, none is as important as the commitment to grow in faith yourself, and to raise your child as a person of faith. We at your parish have made a commitment to you, to support you as you help your child to grow up as a faith-filled Catholic Christian.

Here are some things to think about and to do in your child's first year:

*Pray every day.* Begin each day with a prayer that raises your mind and heart to God, and asks for the wisdom and guidance you need as a parent.

*Bless your child each day.* Make the sign of the cross on his or her forehead and say a brief prayer aloud. Your child will grow, certain of the love of God and his or her parents.

*Schedule Sunday Mass first.* All else will fall into place. We promise! If you or your spouse is not Catholic, now is the perfect time to discuss how your family will live as Catholic Christians. See the link on this website for some thoughts especially for the parent who is not Catholic, and for single parents to whom we pledge our support.

*Find time for quiet.* Balance is so important in life! Parents are pulled in dozens of directions, and it is often easy to overextend your time and energy. Finding time for quiet reflection, to read the Bible, or to read a good book will help you to live a healthy and holy life, and your child will learn from you as he or she matures. Not to mention you'll be a much better parent if you've taken time occasionally to rest, exercise, or quiet yourself after a busy day.

*Study.* If you are tempted to put faith at the end of the list of the many things that vie for your attention, consider this: those who regularly participate in church services:

- Life longer (7.6 years longer, on average);
- Experience less depression, drug use and abuse, and suicide;
- Experience a greater sense of well-being, hope and optimism, purpose and meaning, and self-esteem;
- Have a greater sense of satisfaction within their families, with closer parent-child relationships;
- Children exhibit higher performance in school and attain higher levels of education.

Going to church is no magic bullet, but living a life of faith and raising your child in a faith-filled home will make all the difference, now and into a blessed future!

May God bless you and your family with grace and peace,

[Signature]

*"For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed."* (Psalm 139: 13-16)