

# How to deal with family dynamics when some are non-believers or of different faiths

## Objective:

Talking about our faith with members of our family or friends has never been easy. Discussions about Jesus Christ can quickly turn into heated arguments, He's always been controversial! Even among practicing Catholics there are areas of profound disagreement. We need to put our Christian values into practice when we encounter pushback from family members or friends.

We need to prepare ourselves for many types of discussions with a non believer or a person of a different faith tradition. Conversations don't necessarily need to get heated; in fact, charitably and gently sharing our faith is the best way to lead the nonbeliever into being receptive to the Holy Spirit. After all, it is the Holy Spirit who converts hardened hearts, not us! Our Friday morning large group discussion should explore ways that we can remain charitable and loving in speaking to those who don't share our views of exactly who Jesus is.

**Song Suggestion:** Gather Us In

## Bible & Catechism Readings:

### 1 Pt 3:15-16

"Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame."

### Catechism 856

"The missionary task implies a respectful dialogue with those who do not yet accept the Gospel. Believers can profit from this dialogue by learning to appreciate better "those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God." They proclaim the Good News to those who do not know it, in order to consolidate, complete, and raise up the truth and the goodness that God has distributed among men and nations, and to purify them from error and evil "for the glory of God, the confusion of the demon, and the happiness of man."

**Saint:** St. Francis of Assisi

## Vignette:

One day Vince's father-in-law Richard, a new convert to Catholicism who did not receive RCIA training, was sitting with Vince and his 17 year old son around the kitchen table. Out of the blue, Richard said "someday, someone is going to sue the Catholic Church because they don't allow women to be priests". Vince felt very angry and defensive and thought that he should stand up for the Church, especially since his teenaged son was present. Vince shouted indignantly, saying that a religion can't be sued for it's doctrine. The argument caused resentment between Vince and Richard for a long time. Eventually, they mended their relationship and in time, Vince realized that he got angry because he didn't know the Church's position well enough to calmly discuss it. He decided to be more respectful of his father-in-law while continuing to learn more about Catholic doctrine and dogma so that he could better explain the Church's positions, without getting angry.

## Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

When you were young, did you have arguments with your parents about religion? How did your parents handle these “discussions?”

---

---

---

What are some ways that you have found effective in charitably discussing religious differences with family members?

---

---

---

We may find that our children, who are exposed to unending glamorization of worldly gratification and desire for goods, reject our focus on the Catholic faith and spiritual growth. They list boring “old fashioned” church rituals, out of touch services, priest scandals, and other circumstances as reasons for them not to be practicing Catholics and believers anymore. Worse yet, they may not even care. How do you handle questions or objections your kids have to their Catholic faith?

---

---

---

Was there a time when you wish you spoke up more to explain your faith in Jesus Christ during discussions with a non believer or a family member of a different faith?

---

---

---

## References:

For good advice on how to talk about religion without getting angry:

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/six-rules-for-dealing-with-non-catholic-family-and-friends>

<https://www.catholic.com/audio/caf/anger-as-bad-apologetics>

**Author:** Vince Phelan