

# A CODE FOR PARENTS

“Education, as a rule, will be more effective and lasting which is received in a well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family; and more efficacious in proportion to the clear and constant good example set, first by the parents, and then by the other members of the household.”

Pius XI, The Christian Education of Youth.

## FROM PARENT TO PARENT...

As Catholic parents, we probably know all that is contained within the framework of this code. There is nothing new or extraordinary in most of its provisions, dictated as they are by right reason and the compelling directives of our Catholic Faith. A necessary assumption in this task, and, we think, a safe one, is that we all agree on the principles involved. It is obvious that unless the parents’ vision is clearly illumined by the light of Catholic principles, the transmission of them to their children can never be effective. This Code has attempted to bring into focus these principles as they apply to the delicate and challenging task of rearing our children in modern society.

What is needed now is a certain unanimity and firmness of position, on the part of parents, to resist the common chant of our children that “everyone else does it”. If we Catholic parents will lend to one another the support of a united stand in matters of child conduct, this charge will lose its validity. The Code For Parents is presented in the hope that it will provide us with the basis for consistent, common Catholic action as parents.

## 1. SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The spiritual and religious formation of our children is the great foundation stone upon which all else rests. Unless it is firmly laid, we cannot hope to achieve success in the tremendous task that is ours as parents—that of raising to fine Christian men and women the youngsters whom God has placed in our care. Do you remember the house which the Bible mentions? It may have been a beautiful house, built in the latest modern design; yet when the winds blew, and the rain came, it fell into ruin because its foundations were not upon rock, but on shifting sands.

Our first concern, then, must be that of giving our children a firm and lasting foundation in the form of a sound spiritual and religious training. There are no rigid rules or laws which can be applied to this matter of teaching religion to our children. Parents, as natural teachers, will find natural ways, and God, with whom we co-operate in the function of parenthood, will suggest supernatural ways. However, there are certain basic principles which we should keep in mind.

1. The best way to teach religion is to live it.
2. This teaching should begin when the child is an infant.

## 2. MORAL FORMATION

The moral formation of our children is intimately related to the religious and spiritual; in fact, no one phase of this great teaching job of ours can stand alone, for there is an integration and blending of one with another. The same three basic principles apply here:

- I. Moral character is formed more by example than by rules.
2. This formation and building must begin in infancy.
3. It is our joy and privilege to form the character of our children.

It is in our efforts to mould the moral character of our children that we become conscious of many powerful and disturbing influences outside the home, and we find ourselves and our children being exposed on all sides to ideas and persons who seem intent on tearing down ‘all that we are trying to build. Pope Pius XI, in his great encyclical on the “Christian Education of Youth”, warned Catholic parents against Naturalism, that cancer of the spirit which divorces human belief and human conduct from all reference to God and His ways and laws. Dangerous as this philosophy is

when applied to any phase of human living, it is most deadly when allowed to touch the most delicate matter of modesty and purity.

We must concentrate on developing a positive, attractive approach to moral goodness. It is not sufficient to warn or guard against evil, making God's wise guidance seem to consist of a series of don'ts and prohibitions. It is necessary to demonstrate, by our precept and example, the happiness residing in a good life. God's laws must be seen as signposts pointing to happiness in this world and the world to come, rather than as roadblocks along the highway of life. These laws, in positive action, are expressed through the practice of the moral virtues, particularly those four hinges from which all other Christian virtues swing, namely Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance. In this section, we attempt to point out the application of these virtues to ordinary family life.

### **Code for Moral Formation**

#### **Prudence**

1. Train our children to act wisely and choose right from wrong. The "family conference" can be helpful here.
2. Expect obedience to rules. All of our rules should imply sound reasoning.

#### **Justice**

1. Train our children to be reverent and truthful in dealing with God and others and inculcate in them a sense of responsibility. Sound training in good manners and courtesy is an important beginning.
2. Make honesty and truthfulness something to be desired. Point out that a high mark in an exam is worthless if obtained by cheating.

#### **Fortitude**

1. Train our children to be persevering and patient. Disappointments and the common ills of childhood can be used to teach patience and the acceptance of God's will. Help them to persevere in whatever they undertake.
2. Help our children to acquire serenity and a feeling of security based on loyalty to a true sense of values.
3. Help our children to achieve self-discipline and a spirit of sacrifice.

#### **Temperance**

1. Train our children to control their bodily appetites. Early and continuous training in all forms of temperance will fortify them with the necessary self-discipline to resist the many temptations we know they will encounter in their high school years.
  - (a) Teaching temperance in food and drink should not be too difficult. Our own example will be of great value.
  - (b) Helping our children cultivate chastity presents a greater problem. We should start at an early age by maintaining high standards of purity and modesty in manner and dress. It is important that parents, especially mothers of girls, take a firm and united stand against designers and manufacturers who go to extremes in exploiting "femininity" for profit, and would have our daughters appear in public in clothes that are indecent, vulgar, and a serious threat to their purity and morals. We cannot overlook the difference that exists between girl and boy natures; the former being more psychological, and the latter more physiological. Materialistic designers accentuate in style the very things that inflame passions which our Christian youth are only learning to control.
  - (c) Sex education is our privilege and responsibility, and it is not as difficult as sometimes represented. It is a continuing process that begins in infancy with the atmosphere of love and affection in the home, and it is taught every time we answer questions in a simple and straight-forward manner. In telling our children the beautiful story of divine and human love, we cannot separate the physical and spiritual facts of creation any more than we can separate the soul from the body. The mere knowledge of physical facts can be dangerous unless accompanied by a sound moral and spiritual training that will provide the necessary curbs and restraints.

### **3. SOCIAL FORMATION**

Our children learn at home how to act in society. It is the social attitudes in the home that radiate into the community.

As we consider the social formation of our children, the great foundation stones of a sound religious and moral training take on added importance, because they are the basis for the development of the right social attitudes. In reality, nice manners and social graces are but superficial details unless based upon deeply rooted spiritual and moral principles.

Social adjustment in our present day will not be easy for our children. They soon discover that things they know to be bad in a moral sense are not bad in the opinion of society. As adults we know that it takes strength and courage to be loyal to our principles and to keep from drifting with the tide when “everyone else is doing it”. If we, who have developed some measure of spiritual poise and emotional balance, find the road difficult at times, we can well imagine the confusion and bewilderment of our children.

Ours is the important task of leading and guiding our children to do the right thing in the right way from their own free choice. We can do this by remaining true to what we know is right, by maintaining our parental authority in spite of the pressures and lack of parental authority all around us, by tempering this authority with an abundance of love, confidence, and understanding, and by making sure that WE and not BAD COMPANIONS are the ones who will teach our children how to live in the world.

### **Code for Social Formation**

1. Help children to learn to get along with others.

The “my Johnny can do no wrong” attitude will not help Johnny to “make friends and influence people”.

2. Develop their REAL personalities. Personality is the outward expression of a person’s God-given gifts and talents and cannot be bought at a Charm School. No two children are alike. We can save our children many emotional scars by helping them to develop their own individual gifts instead of trying to make them like somebody else or what we would like them to be.

3. Guide them in choice of companions. Exert every effort to know their friends and the parents of their friends.

4. Instil respect for authority. Children will gain a sense of security, obedience, and respect if our directives are seasoned with love and justice. Our own example is most important. We can’t expect them to respect and obey what we defy and ridicule.

5. Gain and hold their confidence. Be worthy of it. It is important that our children feel we understand them even though our understanding does not always mean approval. Remembering our own childhood will help us understand their problems.

6. Help them to mature in a normal, well-balanced pattern. At the pre-adolescent age our children are sensing the awakening of the powerful procreative instincts in their little bodies. This is the strongest and most powerful instinct known to man. It is our duty to help them keep these new, powerful emotions under control. Because of the completely false conception of sex to which our children are exposed by our pagan world, our job is not an easy one. It is up to us to counteract objectionable influences by providing them with a constructive programme of diversion. It is wise, too, to slow down rather than hasten boy and girl relationships at this time in their lives. This will take wisdom and firmness on our part.

We find ourselves on the receiving end of all kinds of pressures from children and from parents who are unconsciously immature in their thinking. The pressure from our children we can handle; we’ve been on the receiving end of that since they were babies, but the pressure from parents is something else again—there are many who seem bent on a programme of FORCED FEEDING, of throwing youngsters into situations for which they are emotionally unprepared.

Mothers of girls seem to be the worst offenders here. If we are to slow down rather than accelerate boy-girl relationships in the elementary school age, it is obvious that we should not allow mixed parties or dating. These activities at this early age are emotionally disturbing influences; they clutter the child’s mind with false excitement; his school work suffers and he does not mature in a balanced pattern.

## **4. INTELLECTUAL FORMATION**

The study of the intellectual formation of our children brings clearly to mind that it is the inalienable right of parents to educate their children.

This teaching authority is invested in parents by God and grants them the freedom to choose the school and the

teachers in whom, they may, in turn, invest some of that authority. Let us realize how precious these rights are, be on guard against those who would take them from us. Let us conscientiously fulfil these duties as God would expect them to be fulfilled.

Let us keep in mind that the home is the school of schools, and we as parents are the prime educators of our children. We ask for help five hours a day, five days a week, about nine months of the year, but we can expect the teachers to do only part of our work in the school. Let us keep in mind also that for the best results, parents and teachers, home and school, must work closely together in a spirit of co-operation and understanding. It is important that our children be convinced that we are standing behind the school and that the authority of the home and the authority of the school are one. It is through this united effort that we can hope to give our children the kind of education that will best develop in them the ideas, attitudes, and habits that will prepare them for Christ-like living.

### **Code for Intellectual Formation**

1. Full co-operation with all school rules. To achieve better understanding of the sound reasoning behind these, rules we would suggest that early each school year Parents' Associations devote meeting time to discussion and explanation.
2. Completion of homework assignments. Our interest in this phase of the school programme brings us closer to our children, gives us an insight into their talents and abilities, and shows them that we are interested in their progress and achievement.
3. Interest in report cards, tempered with reason and recognition of child's ability. It is reasonable to expect a child to do the best work of which he is capable; it is unreasonable to expect A's from an average student. Remember, most children are average. Offering money to a child for each A, when he is only capable of B's or C's is unfair, often leads to cheating or makes him feel inadequate.
4. Take advantage of parent-teacher conferences. Remember, we see the child only in relation to the rest of the family; the teacher sees him in contrast to an entire class, and therefore, can point out to us many things that never have occasion to arise in the home, and yet, are essential to the total intellectual formation.
5. Interest in our children's extracurricular activities. Attending school functions, providing transportation for games and field trips can be richly rewarding to both parent and child.
6. Week night activities, such as movies, baby-sitting, and other part time employment are detrimental to school work.
7. Respect for teachers. No criticism of a teacher should be made in the presence of our children. If problems arise, teachers should be consulted privately.
8. Cultural influences in the home; literature, music, art. Never before have there been so many well-written, beautifully illustrated books for children. A number of publishers are now presenting great literary classics in simplified text and format.
9. Make use of cultural advantage provided by community. Our local historical landmarks, events, libraries, museums, and interesting spots of nature, offer wonderful opportunities of joy and culture for our children.
10. Love and respect for country and appreciation of our Australian heritage can be fostered by our own attitude and example.

### **5. RECREATIONAL FORMATION**

This responsibility of being a parent has its lighter side, for the recreational formation of our children can be fun, and at the same time provide us with excellent tools to help in the other phases of our teaching. Many valuable lessons can be taught and learned in the relaxed and happy atmosphere of play. Confidence and love can be developed and family ties strengthened as parents and children and their friends have fun together.

In these days when passive recreation has hit an all time high, when excitement and thrill-hunting is the pattern of behaviour all around us, it is important that we give time, thought, and energy to creative recreational activities rather than to those that are directed or bought. Our major responsibility here is to provide an environment for free recreational enjoyment for our youngsters and to introduce them to satisfying and constructive use of leisure time.

### **Code for Recreational Formation**

1. Plan to encourage family activities as a group—trips, picnics, backyard activities, barbecues, games, hobbies, etc.
2. Provide atmosphere that makes it possible for children to create their own recreation at home—from swings in the backyard when the baby is three—to free use of the kitchen for cooking and snacks.
3. Encourage active games and sports, tempered with reason and understanding of child's ability and physical endurance.
4. Beware of radio and television programmes and movies.
5. Supervise reading material. Provide the best in this field. The value of good books as a profitable use of leisure time cannot be over-estimated. Parents who have not made it a practice of having a story-hour, half-hour, or even a quarter' hour (as time permits) have missed a satisfying and rewarding experience. Comic and "trashy" pocket-size books will present no problem if a child has developed a taste for good literature.

### **6. PHYSICAL FORMATION**

It is generally recognized that the health and safety of children is primarily the concern of parents. Doctors, Clinics, Health Departments, and Schools can and do give valuable help, but the actual physical formation rests with the home. Aside from the daily care on our part, it is important that we help our children develop good health habits and train them to have respect and reverence for their bodies and those of others. The lessons learned in the religious and moral formation can be applied here. From a study of the fifth commandment a child learns that his body is not his own; it belongs to God. He is bound to take care of it, and to do with it not what he wishes, but what God wills. A sound development of the moral virtues will provide the motive for caring for his body.

Prudence shows him the wisdom of cleanliness, balanced meals, the use of remedies during illness, and the obedience to safety and traffic rules. Justice helps him to see Christ in his playmates, shows him why he must have respect and concern for the health and well-being of others. Fortitude will give him the courage to bear hurts and sickness bravely and teach him that suffering can be a powerful prayer. The exercise of temperance in controlling his bodily appetites will provide him with the finest form of health insurance.

#### **Code for Physical Formation**

1. Take care to provide properly balanced meals; particularly an adequate breakfast. Girls, especially, attracted to dietary fads, must be supervised on this latter point.
2. Insist upon a sufficient amount of sleep. In their enthusiasm for play many children get over-tired; help them to use good judgment in this.
3. Encourage habits of cleanliness, especially washing hands before eating.
4. Co-operate with the school health programme. Follow through on recommendations of school nurse, examining physician, and dentist.
5. Take a health inventory of the family at regular intervals. Periodic physical and dental examinations provide the "ounce of prevention" that is "worth a pound of cure".
6. Prevent unnecessary accidents by insisting upon the observance of safety rules in the home, at play, and on the street. This is especially true in regard to bicycle riding.

### **7. ECONOMIC FORMATION**

One of the great lessons in this material world is to learn to be happy with the talents and abilities God has given us. In the economic formation of our children it is important that we teach them how to live graciously within their means. This is not an easy lesson to learn, because since the beginning of time it has been the nature of man to want more than he needs. As parents, we know too well that in this present day of high pressure advertising and salesmanship it is difficult to control our own material desires. Yet, if we are to give our children a true sense of values in regard to material things, it is important that we distinguish clearly between incidentals and fundamentals and that we, and not "The Jones Family", set the Christian standard of living in our homes.

One of the most practical guides to the proper use of material goods comes to us from the economic views of St. Thomas Aquinas as set forth by Dom Virgil Michel, O.S.B. He logically divides needs and wants in the following

manner:

1. Absolute necessities: the basic foods, clothing, and shelter necessary for life.
2. Conditional necessities: items made necessary by time and place and one's state in life. In this unusual class of goods, a family will be able to govern expenses only by considering whether the item in question will contribute to a more wholesome family life in its particular circumstances.
3. Luxuries: these are items without which a family can get along very well, particularly when acquiring them takes time and effort which should go into family living.

The earlier we begin with our children to make them realize that happiness comes from using money wisely instead of satisfying their every whim, the better we will build for their future happiness.

#### **Code for Economic Formation**

1. If an allowance system is used it should be kept within reasonable bounds. Wisely proportioned and directed, this can make our children feel that they are sharing in the wealth of the family as well as in the work and play. Suggesting wholesome and attractive goals can provide incentive for children to spend sensibly and save systematically.
2. As soon as our children receive an allowance, they should be taught their responsibility in contributing to the support of their parish church, missions, and other needs of the family of Christ. Just debts and obligations should take precedence over personal gratification. The concept of Christian stewardship should be taught our children. They should understand that since all things belong to God, we are stewards of His property—our own things, school property, and the property of others.
3. We should begin early to teach our youngsters (especially girls) that extreme styles in clothes are not smart, and that good taste and simplicity are more important than price. This should be borne in mind in forming a judgment on school uniforms.
4. Children should be taught respect for school property, placing it on the same level as family property.
5. Helping children to see that true value rests in the sacrifice involved rather than the amount spent can discourage extravagance in entertainment and gifts.
6. Our sense of fairness tells us that we should not give our children monetary rewards for fulfilment of household duties or report card marks. There is a principle of justice involved. They are members of the family; we have a right to expect them to share in the work of the family. We have a right as parents, too, after spending money for schooling, to expect the best work possible for the five hours a day they spend in school. However, an occasional bonus for outstanding achievement can be an incentive for better work and study.

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