



FIRST WITNESSES

An ICF Initiative

Phase 2 / Pilot Parishes

What is First Witnesses?

First Witnesses is an innovative approach to stem the tide of disaffiliation by strengthening the relationship among parents and their parish. Experience tells us that parents have an incredible influence on their children's choice to remain engaged in religious practices. Birth to age three is the most precious time in a child's life when the appropriation of ritual and language is strongest. *First Witnesses* seeks to combine the latest research with practical resources and opportunities for parents and parishes to build a culture of faithfulness.

PHASE 1

The first phase was launched in February 2024 and seeks ongoing engagement primarily through digital resources, including videos, learning paths, and newsletters, while becoming a growing online content source.

PHASE 2

The second phase includes partnering with a number of pilot parishes during the fall of 2024 to support the parish with innovative ways to provide outreach and formation for families with children 0 to 5 years of age.

PHASE 3

The third phase will begin in the summer and fall of 2025 and involve an open application for additional parishes to partner with *First Witnesses* to accompany families with young children recently baptized up to 5 years of age.

You are invited

Your parish is invited to be a pilot parish in Phase 2. Under a collaborative arrangement, there will be ongoing training, resources, and regular follow-through for your parish and your families during the formative years of faith development. Each family enrolled in *First Witnesses* through your parish will be accompanied by fellow parishioners (i.e., Partner Families), bridging the family to the parish within a supportive relationship. Each family will receive guidance and meaningful gifts from their Partner Families that promote a loving home filled with daily practices and habits of faith that are fun, formational, and binding.

FOR THE PASTOR AND/OR HIS DESIGNEE:

What is needed from the parish?

1. A point person at the parish for *First Witnesses*
2. Regular accompaniment through outreach to enrolled families by the Partner Families and the pastor or deacon every six months for up to five years. *First Witnesses* is open to families that have children 0 to 5 years old who were baptized.
3. To host gatherings for fellowship, worship, and prayer to commemorate/celebrate the yearly anniversary of the baptism
4. Pastor and/or designee involvement:
 - + Deliver message to the parish about *First Witnesses*
 - + Identify potential Partner Families
 - + Support the Partner Families
 - + Be present at the annual gathering of newly baptized families
 - + Track engagement of participating families in LEAD
5. For the parish to be open to reimagining baptism prep by supplementing their current approach with additional content and resources provided by *First Witnesses* to build up the parents' ability to be true first witnesses of the faith while learning how to create a catholic culture at home.
 - + Videos of Bishop Frank speaking directly to the parents
 - + Sacred Steps, Milestones, and Creating a Catholic Culture from *First Witnesses*
 - + The option to use *Reborn* from the Augustine Institute
6. Though most of the costs are covered by the grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc., along with the Diocesan contribution, the Parish is to contribute a one-time fee of \$1,500 to help cover some of the expenses of trainings, family gifts, publications, and access to ongoing resources. However, no parish will be turned away if they cannot pay the entire fee, and payments can be spread out over 3 to 5 years.