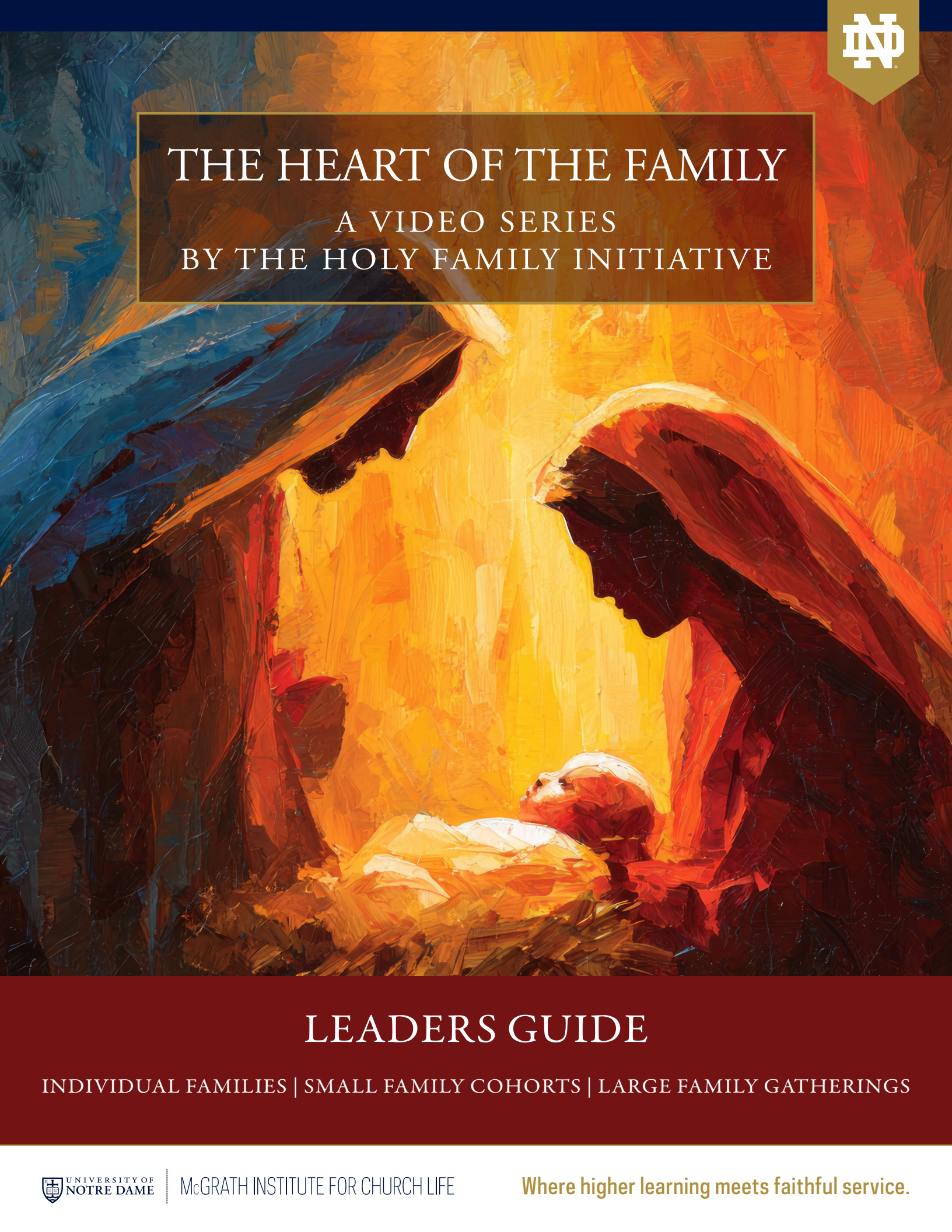


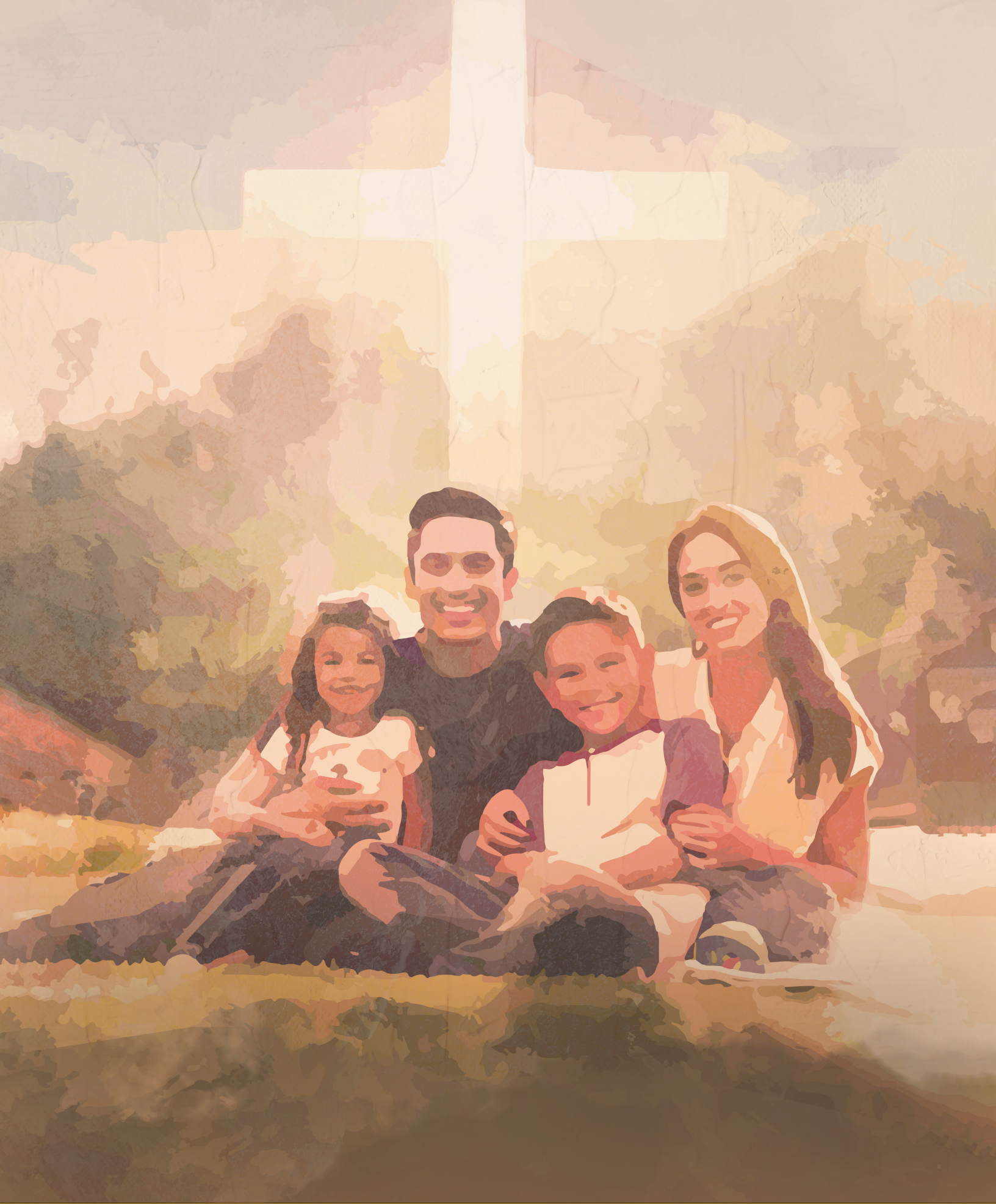
A dramatic, expressive oil painting of the Nativity scene. The Virgin Mary is shown in profile, looking down at the infant Jesus who lies in a manger. The scene is illuminated by a warm, golden light, possibly from the rising sun or a divine glow. The background is dark and textured, with deep blues and reds. The overall style is highly textured and emotional.

# THE HEART OF THE FAMILY

A VIDEO SERIES  
BY THE HOLY FAMILY INITIATIVE

## LEADERS GUIDE

INDIVIDUAL FAMILIES | SMALL FAMILY COHORTS | LARGE FAMILY GATHERINGS



# THE HEART OF THE FAMILY

## A VIDEO SERIES

### BY THE HOLY FAMILY INITIATIVE

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# I. Instructions for Individual Families

*The Heart of the Family* can be used by individual families at home. They can simply download the Sessions Guide, stream the videos in the Sessions tab, and follow these instructions to engage with the reflection questions, the family activities, and the closing prayer.

## 1. Choose a day and time that works best for your family members

Each session lasts approximately one hour. You may choose to meet daily for seven consecutive days, once a week, or once a month.

## 2. Visit the website: [HolyFamilySeries.nd.edu](http://HolyFamilySeries.nd.edu)

Go to the Sessions tab and select the session you will watch. Play Videos One and Two back-to-back.

## 3. Reflect

After watching Video Two, lead a conversation using the reflection questions found in the Session Guide. When necessary, adapt the questions so that young children can participate in the conversation.

## 4. Pray

After discussing the reflection questions, conclude this family time by watching and praying along with Video Three.

## 5. Act

After Video Three, return to the Session Guide to find the list of family activities.

Parents may consult the facilitator's script located at the end of this document to gain a better overview of how to conduct each session.

When you are done with all sessions, we welcome your feedback regarding the content of this video series via the Evaluation tab on the website.

## II. Instruction for Small Family Cohorts

*The Heart of the Family* can be used by small cohorts of three to five families.

### How are the small family cohorts created?

- Individual families can create their own cohort by inviting two to four families from your neighborhood, your parish community, or the families of your siblings, friends, and other relatives.
- The parish or school can assign family cohorts by running a promotional and sign-up campaign, and assigning cohorts based on the family's zip code, language preference, number and age of children, or their available day and time to meet. See the Notes for parish-based and school-based cohorts for more information on this option.

### What are the necessary elements for small family cohorts to work properly?

1. A hosting family
2. A reliable internet connection to stream the videos from the website [HolyFamilySeries.nd.edu](http://HolyFamilySeries.nd.edu)
3. Access to the Sessions Guide, also found in the website
4. The required materials for the family activities listed in the Sessions Guide

### What are the responsibilities of the hosting family?

- The host family, together with the other families, helps to determine the frequency, location, and time of their meetings. Families may choose to meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. Take into account children's school commitments, work schedules, and any significant events coming up such as holidays and birthdays.
- The hosting family sends reminders regarding the day, time, and location of the upcoming meeting; reminds the families to bring the materials required for family activities as outlined in the Session Guide, and if the group chooses to add a family meal to the session, reminds them to bring a dish to share.

- The hosting family manages the schedule of each gathering. Each gathering may last between one and two hours. Refer to the schedule below and the facilitator's script at the end of this guide to know what to say at each specific point in the schedule.

## What's the schedule of these family gatherings?

Based on the needs of the families, this schedule can be modified.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>45 minutes</b> | <b>Welcome and family meal (optional).</b> Each family can bring a food item to share, including food for the children; be mindful of any dietary restrictions.                                             |
| <b>25 minutes</b> | <b>Family session - watch Videos One and Two.</b> <a href="https://www.holyfamilyseries.nd.edu">Visit HolyFamilySeries.nd.edu</a> , click on the Sessions tab, and stream videos one and two consecutively. |
| <b>15 minutes</b> | <b>Family conversations.</b> After video two, read the reflection questions in the Sessions Guide and lead a family conversation.                                                                           |
| <b>5 minutes</b>  | <b>Final prayer - watch Video Three.</b> This video will guide you through the closing prayer. Follow along with the Sessions Guide.                                                                        |
| <b>25 minutes</b> | <b>Family activities and dismissal.</b> Follow the instructions for the activities in the Sessions Guide. Plan the logistical details for the next gathering.                                               |

## Tips for small family cohorts:

- Create a safe space where young children can participate in the sessions alongside the rest of the family, or where they can play while other family members watch the videos. You may designate a specific area of the house for the children to play and assign one or two adults to supervise them. Teenagers and young adults are welcome to participate fully in the sessions.
- The responsibilities of the hosting family, and the responsibility to watch over the young children can be rotated among all the families in the group.
- Keep the gatherings simple. They do not need to be highly elaborate or perfect. What's most important is to attend with an open heart, supporting one another on your shared journey of faith.
- Respond with compassion to the needs of others. Should a family need to miss a session, arrive late, or if a baby is having a difficult day, react with love and empathy.
- If you decide to participate in a small cohort, make a serious commitment as a family. Participating in small groups may require you to open your home to other families, to arrive punctually at scheduled meetings, to honor the presence of others, and to volunteer to take on various responsibilities during the sessions.

## Notes for parish-based and school-based cohorts

If a parish or school decides to offer this program and to form small groups of families, consider the following points.

- Designate a parish or school staff member to coordinate the promotion, registration, and the creation of small cohorts, as well as the necessary training for hosting families.
- Consider offering parish or school facilities as a venue for these gatherings.
- Following registration—though not strictly necessary—consider grouping families based on their specific needs; for example, group families by zip code, or offer specific groups for young families with small children, families with children with special needs, multi-generational groups that include grandparents, and so on.
- You may launch the family cohorts with a special gathering at the parish or school for all participating families, where you can explain how to use the program, and review the parish, school, and diocesan guidelines regarding home gatherings and safe environment protocols. Additionally, you may give the family cohorts the opportunity to select the day, location, and time for their meetings, as well as to assign their hosting family.
- You may conclude the family cohort's experience with a special gathering at the parish or school for all participating families where you can celebrate a Mass, evaluate the families experience, and invite these families to continue growing and serving in various parish ministries or school groups.

### III. Instructions for Large Family Gatherings Organized by a Parish or School

This model is ideal for parishes and Catholic schools that would like to convene all families of their communities in a parish hall or school gym.

#### What are the key elements for large-group family gatherings?

1. A person to coordinate the implementation of the program
2. A person to facilitate each session
3. A reliable internet connection to stream the videos
4. Access to the Sessions Guide—available on the website [HolyFamilySeries.nd.edu](http://HolyFamilySeries.nd.edu)—so that families can read the reflection questions and the family activities

#### What are the responsibilities of the person coordinating the program's implementation?

This person plans and makes decisions regarding the necessary logistics to carry out these sessions. Among other things, this person:

- Determines the dates, time, and place for each gathering.
- Plans a promotional campaign using appropriate channels, such as the parish bulletin, emails to parents, or the school's or parish's social media platforms.
- Creates a registration system for families.
- Assigns a facilitator for the sessions who will be responsible for managing the schedule. The facilitator's responsibilities are explained in the next question; this guide also provides a script that can be used by the facilitator during the meetings.
- Assembles a team of volunteers to assist with the various needs of these gatherings—from welcoming attendees and handling the check-in process, to cleaning the venue at the end of each gathering.

- Maintains consistent communication with participating families by answering their questions and sending reminders regarding upcoming gatherings.
- The following responsibilities are optional, depending on the resources available to the parish or school:
  - Organizing childcare, as well as recruiting and training volunteers for this task.
  - Providing a family meal before each session, sponsored by various ministries or organizations.
  - Assigning a musician or praise and worship team to provide music during these gatherings.

### What are the responsibilities of the facilitator?

In addition to following the instructions of the person coordinating the program's implementation, the facilitator is responsible for leading each session, keeping track of time, and engaging with the audience enthusiastically. The facilitator also:

- Becomes familiar with the content of each session by watching the videos and reading the Sessions Guide prior to each gathering.
- Becomes familiar with the facilitator's script located at the end of this guide.

## What is the schedule for each family gathering?

The program coordinator determines the final schedule. The facilitator guides each moment. Below is a sample schedule.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Set up</b>     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>45 minutes</b> | <b>Welcome and family meal (optional).</b> The facilitator offers words of welcome and leads a prayer to open the session—or a prayer over the food, if a meal is being provided to the participants. Background music may be played, or praise songs may be offered immediately following the meal.                         |
| <b>25 minutes</b> | <b>Childcare starts; watch Videos One and Two.</b> The facilitator provides instructions regarding childcare. They also invite families to prepare to listen to the presentation by watching the first two videos back-to-back.                                                                                              |
| <b>15 minutes</b> | <b>Family conversations.</b> Using the Sessions Guide, the facilitator provides instructions on how to participate in family conversations.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>5 minutes</b>  | <b>Closing prayer; childcare concludes.</b> The facilitator invites the families to follow along with the closing prayer in the Sessions Guide while watching Video Three. If childcare is provided, the children may rejoin the larger group at a convenient time—either before the closing prayer or the final activities. |
| <b>25 minutes</b> | <b>Family activities.</b> The facilitator provides instructions and materials for families to carry out one or both activities, as indicated in the Sessions Guide.                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>5 minutes</b>  | <b>Announcements and farewell.</b> The facilitator provides information regarding the next session. A joyful song may be played while people say their goodbyes.                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Clean up</b>   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## Tips for large family gatherings.

- Involve various families during the sessions by asking them to serve as facilitators, or to lead the opening prayer or the prayer before meals.
- If the parish or school is unable to provide a full meal, consider offering a simple snack that families can enjoy—either as they arrive, or during family conversations or activities, or at the end of the session to encourage them to linger for a moment and continue getting to know other families.
- Determine what the parish or school can provide for the families. For example, you might give them a printed copy of the Sessions Guide; or for session one, you could give them a crucifix or a religious image blessed by your parish priest for their prayer space at home. For session two, you could provide cards featuring the prayers to the angels that they can display on their refrigerator or prayer space.
- The content of the seventh session follows a format distinct from the rest of the sessions and serves as a concluding experience for the families. The required materials are essential for this experience to be successful; please plan accordingly.
- During this final, seventh session, the parish or school might organize a ministry fair featuring various organizations where families can find opportunities to continue their formation or service to the community. You might also plan a special Mass or a sending-forth blessing specifically for these families.
- At the conclusion of the final session, invite families to share their feedback regarding this series by visiting the Evaluation tab on the website: [HolyFamilySeries.nd.edu](https://HolyFamilySeries.nd.edu).

## IV. Instructions for Large Family Gatherings Facilitators

These instructions for the session facilitator follows the schedule outlined previously for large family gatherings organized by parishes or schools. The person coordinating the implementation of the program will provide a version adapted to the specific needs of the parish or school. It is recommended that the facilitator keep a copy of the Sessions Guide close at hand while reading these instructions.

### Welcome and family meal

- Offer a warm welcome.
- Explain the purpose of these meetings using words similar to these: “We have gathered to participate in *The Heart of the Family* in order to understand our calling to be a ‘domestic church’—that is, a family that lives and celebrates our Catholic faith at home. We will walk this path by following the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth, learning from them how our faith shapes every aspect of our lives as parents, spouses, children, and siblings. We are here because we love our families and want what is best for them: that the Lord may be the very heart of our families.”
- Briefly explain the meeting schedule using words similar to these: “First, we will enjoy a delicious family meal together. Afterward—while the children aged \_\_\_ to \_\_\_ head off to childcare—the teenagers, young adults, and adults will remain here to watch a few short videos designed to help us reflect on today’s topic. We will conclude this meeting by discussing some reflection questions and engaging in family activities.”
- Offer a prayer of grace before meals, or a prayer to open the meeting. You may wish to invite a participant to lead the prayer.
- Toward the end of the meal, you may invite a musician to play a few joyful songs before the children head off to childcare and the videos begin.

## Childcare starts; watch Videos One and Two

- If childcare is provided, explain how it will work and dismiss the children.
- Looking at the Sessions Guide, share the title of the session and read the opening lines which briefly explain what the session will cover. If you have already watched the corresponding videos, provide a concise summary of what to expect.
- Play videos one and two consecutively. Optionally, after the first video—while you are preparing to play the second—you may ask participants to silently reflect on a point they remember from Video One. If time permits, you may invite the tables to share what they took away from Video One while you prepare for Video Two.

## Family conversation

- After Videos One and Two, provide instructions for the family conversations using the reflection questions found in the Sessions Guide. You may base your instructions on the following points:
  - Read one question at a time.
  - Before answering, allow a brief moment for all family members to think about their response.
  - After that brief moment, invite each family member to share.
  - Remember that we share in order to listen, not to respond. Invite everyone to respect each person's experiences.
  - If a family member does not wish to participate, it is fine to pass.
- During the conversations, give a two-minute warning before moving on to the next item in the schedule.
- If time permits, you may invite two or three people to share what they heard at their table with the larger group.

## Final prayer, Video Three

- Welcome the children back at a time that is most convenient—either before the closing prayer or before family activities.
- Each final prayer invites a different response from the participating families; please refer to the Sessions Guide for instructions regarding the final prayer.
- When the families are ready, play Video Three. Families may follow along with the prayer using their copy of the Sessions Guide or by reading the prayer as it appears in the video.

## Family activities

- Provide the necessary materials to the families. The list of materials can be found in the Sessions Guide.
- Although these activities are mentioned in the videos, please consult the Sessions Guide to read about them in detail. If families do not have a copy of the Sessions Guide, display the activities on the screen.
- Some activities are intended to be carried out at home—such as creating a prayer space in session one. In such cases, simply explain the activity in detail so that families can complete it later.
- Most of the activities involve sharing stories using a photograph or an object that families have at home. In advance, ask families to bring that specific photo or object. If they do not have one, simply ask families to share their stories in great detail. Sharing stories of faith as a family is a way to discuss the importance and impact of our faith.

## Announcements and dismissal.

- Thank the families for their time. Remind them of the date, time, and location of the next session.
- Invite the families to reflect on what they have heard and learned during this session as they make their way home.
- You may also ask them to bring materials for the activities in the next session—such as a photo or an object.
- You might also invite a musician to sing a joyful song as people say their goodbyes.

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