

## Catholic Dads Spiritual Triathlon

### A Bridge to Day 3

#### *The Sacred Heart and the Layers of Catholic Fatherhood*

June is dedicated in a special way to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. For Catholic dads, this devotion is not merely sentimental. It is a school of fatherhood.

The Sacred Heart reveals the love of Christ: self-giving, merciful, courageous, meek, and strong. It shows us that true authority is not domination. True authority is love ordered toward the good of the other. It is protection without harshness, strength without pride, correction without contempt, and leadership without self-exaltation.

This is the kind of fatherhood Catholic dads are called to learn.

Not a fatherhood driven by fear. Not a fatherhood shaped by drift. Not a fatherhood ruled by distraction, resentment, control, or emotional reactivity. But a fatherhood increasingly formed by the Heart of Christ.

Before we conclude with Day 3 of the Catholic Dads Spiritual Triathlon: Modeling the Good, it is worth pausing to consider a practical formation tool: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model for Catholic Dad Education.

At first glance, that may sound academic. But the basic insight is simple and powerful: no father is formed in isolation. Every dad lives within layers of influence. He is shaped by his family history, marriage, children, parish, workplace, friendships, media, technology, culture, economic pressures, and the changing seasons of life.

But here is the important part: a Catholic dad is not only shaped by those environments. He also helps shape them. That matters.

### From Providence to the Mind to the Home

The Catholic Dads Spiritual Triathlon has moved through three related movements.

**Day 1: Trusting Providence** invited fathers to see that God is present even when the brook is drying up. Like Elijah, the Catholic dad must learn that God's care may arrive in ways he did not expect, choose, or control. Providence does not make fathers passive. It gives them courage to take the next faithful step.

**Day 2: Renewal of the Mind** invited fathers to examine the thoughts, fears, reactions, and interior patterns that often shape their behavior. A Catholic dad may believe in God's providence but still live under the weight of anxious or distorted thoughts: "I am alone," "Everything depends on me," "My child will never change," or "If I cannot control this, everything will fall apart."

That is why the interior pause matters: Name the thought. Test it against truth. Ask for grace. Choose charity.

This is not self-help detached from faith. It is a Catholic practice of discernment, virtue, repentance, and cooperation with grace.

**Day 3: Modeling the Good** turns toward the home. Children do not learn only from what fathers say. They learn from what fathers repeatedly embody. A father is, in a real sense, a living curriculum.

If a father speaks of trust but lives in panic, the child learns panic. If he speaks of prayer but never prays, the child learns that prayer is decorative. If he speaks of respect but treats his wife harshly, the child learns contradiction.

But if a father prays, apologizes, blesses, listens, works diligently, returns after failure, and speaks of God with humble confidence, the child sees faith become flesh. That is the bridge to Day 3.

## The Sacred Heart as the Center of the Father's Ecology

Bronfenbrenner's model helps us see layers of formation: the immediate home, the parish, school, work, extended family, technology, culture, and time. These are real. They shape the father. They shape the child. They shape the family atmosphere.

But for the Catholic dad, the center cannot be psychology, social theory, or technique. The center must be Christ.

More specifically, in this month of June, we can ask: Are the layers of my life being formed by fear, drift, and distraction—or by the Sacred Heart of Jesus?

That question changes everything.

A father may not be able to control every layer of his environment. He cannot control every cultural message, every influence, every school pressure, every peer relationship, every algorithm, every family history wound, or every difficulty his children will face.

But he can begin at the center. He can ask Christ to form his heart. He can bring his thoughts under the light of truth. He can repent when he fails. He can repair when he wounds. He can pray visibly. He can bless his children. He can speak with gentleness. He can return to Confession. He can make Sunday Mass the center of the week. He can create small daily rhythms that make grace easier to notice and charity easier to practice.

This is where microchange matters.

## Microchange and the Catholic Life

A microchange is a small, deliberate change in thought, behavior, or rhythm. By itself, it may look unimpressive. But over time, small faithful changes can become substantive transformation.

A father who pauses before reacting is making a microchange. A father who puts the phone down and looks his child in the eye is making a microchange. A father who apologizes instead of justifying himself is making a microchange. A father who prays before opening Scripture is making a microchange. A father who blesses his child before bed is making a microchange. A father who speaks respectfully to his wife in a tense moment is making a microchange. A father who names an anxious thought and asks for grace before acting is making a microchange. A father who chooses Confession as an ordinary rhythm of repentance is making a microchange.

These small acts matter because the human person is formed through repeated acts. But Catholic dads must keep the order clear: grace is not caused by technique. Grace is the gift of God. Virtue grows as we freely cooperate with grace over time.

In other words, microchange is not a replacement for conversion. It is one way conversion becomes visible.

## The Father as Missionary Within the Layers

Catholic dads are not formed in isolation, and neither are their children. Family, parish, work, school, friends, media, technology, culture, and history all influence the home. But Catholic fathers are not helpless before those layers.

A father who becomes more patient changes the emotional climate of the home. A father who prays with his children changes the spiritual rhythm of the family. A father who reconnects Sunday Mass with Monday morning changes the meaning of the week. A father who speaks of God's providence during difficulty changes how his

children interpret suffering. A father who lives repentance changes how his children understand sin and mercy. A father who honors his wife changes how his children understand love. A father who joins with other Catholic men changes the support system around his vocation. A father who serves in parish life changes what his children believe Catholic life looks like.

This is why the ecological model matters. It helps dads see both influence and responsibility. It reminds fathers that the home is connected to many systems. But it also reminds them that faithful men, rooted in Christ, can become agents of formation within those same systems.

The goal is not anxious control. The goal is alignment with Christ.

## **A Sacred Heart Examination for Catholic Dads**

Before Day 3, take a few minutes and ask:

- Where am I being formed by fear rather than trust?
- Where am I being formed by distraction rather than prayer?
- Where am I being formed by control rather than providence?
- Where am I being formed by resentment rather than mercy?
- Where am I being formed by noise rather than the Word of God?
- Where am I being formed by cultural drift rather than Catholic conviction?
- Where am I being formed by self-protection rather than the Sacred Heart?

Then ask:

- What is one microchange I can make today?
- Can I pray with my child?
- Can I apologize to my wife or child?
- Can I put my phone away at dinner?
- Can I read Scripture for five minutes?
- Can I plan Confession?
- Can I speak calmly when I want to react?
- Can I show my family that faith is not merely something I believe, but something I live?

## **For Those Who Support Catholic Dads**

This tool is not only for fathers. It can also help those who support them: wives, grandparents, homeschool families, Catholic schools, parish leaders, coaches, counselors, mentors, and Catholic men's groups.

If we want fathers to grow, we must ask what supports fatherhood.

- Do Catholic dads have brothers in Christ?
- Do parishes make space for men to be formed?
- Do schools and homeschool communities help fathers see themselves as spiritual leaders?
- Do Catholic organizations equip men for prayer, virtue, repentance, and domestic church life?
- Do we speak to fathers only when something goes wrong, or do we actively call them into mission?

Bronfenbrenner's model reminds us that formation is layered. The Church can support fathers not only by telling them what they should be, but by helping build environments where it becomes easier to live faithfully.

## **The Bridge to Day 3**

Day 1 taught us to trust Providence. Day 2 taught us to let Christ renew the mind. Day 3 asks us to model the good.

That final movement is crucial because children need more than lectures. They need embodied witnesses. They need to see what charity looks like under pressure. They need to see repentance after failure. They need to see reverence at Mass, patience at home, mercy in conflict, and courage in difficulty.

They need fathers whose hearts are being formed by the Heart of Christ.

The Catholic dad is not called to be perfect. He is called to be faithful. And faithfulness becomes visible in small, repeated acts of love.

## Closing Prayer

***Sacred Heart of Jesus, form our hearts like Yours.***

Teach us to trust the Father's providence. Renew our minds in truth. Make our homes schools of charity. Help us to lead without domination, protect without pride, correct without contempt, and love without counting the cost.

Give Catholic dads the grace to reflect, discern, microchange, lead, and leave a legacy of faith.

*Sacred Heart of Jesus, make our homes more like Your Heart. Amen.*

## Closing Charge

**Reflect. Discern. Microchange. Lead. Leave a legacy.**

— Edward L. De La Loza, EdD, LCSW  
Founder, CatholicDadsHQ.com

## References and Recommended Reading

- Sacred Scripture: John 15:5; Joshua 24:15; Matthew 11:29; Romans 12:1–2; 1 Kings 17:1–6; Luke 12:24.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, §§2205 and 2685, on the Christian family, prayer, and formation within the domestic church.
- Day 1: Trusting Providence, Catholic Dads Spiritual Triathlon, on providence, Scripture, and the next faithful step.
- Day 2: Renewal of the Mind, Catholic Dads Spiritual Triathlon, on discernment, renewal of thought, virtue, and grace.
- Day 3: Modeling the Good, Catholic Dads Spiritual Triathlon, on the father as living curriculum, the domestic church, and ecological formation.
- Bronfenbrenner, Urie, Ecological Systems Theory, used here as a helpful developmental lens for considering family, school, parish, culture, media, and historical influences on fathers and children.

# Formation Tool: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Use this one-page model to reflect on the layers shaping a Catholic dad and his family: home, parish, work, school, culture, technology, and the seasons of life.



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Faith formation is job one

PRESENTS

## BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL MODEL FOR CATHOLIC DAD EDUCATION

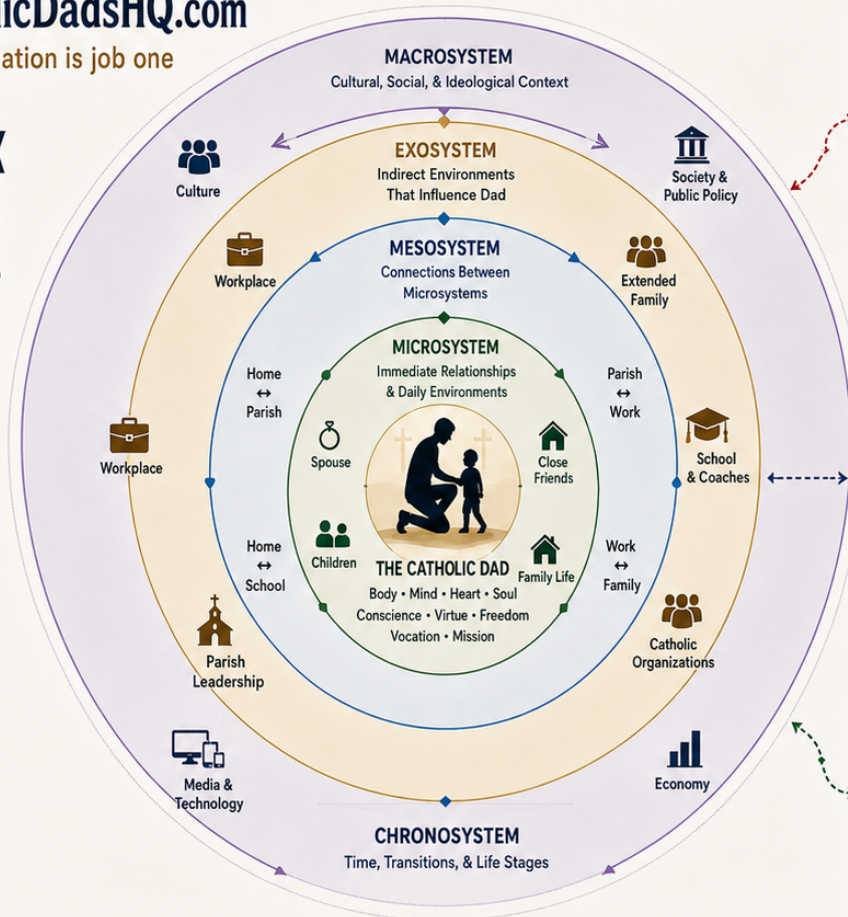
A lifelong formation framework showing how Catholic dads are shaped by their environment—and how, through reflection and microchange, they can align their thoughts and behaviors with their evolving values as they age.

### THE GOAL



To become the man, husband, father, and leader God is calling you to be—living in alignment with your vocation and evolving values.

### A LIFELONG MODEL: STABILITY, RISK, AND GROWTH



#### IF NOT EXAMINED:



#### RISK OF DRIFT

Unexamined thoughts and habits can become fixed over time, leading to misalignment, stagnation, and unhealthy patterns that impact your family, relationships, and spiritual life.



#### STABILITY OVER TIME

When environments are healthy and supports are strong, the model helps dads remain stable and faithful through the seasons of life.



#### GROWTH & CHANGE

When you examine your thoughts and behaviors and adapt over time, the model becomes a pathway for growth, deeper virtue, and legacy.



#### ROOTED IN CHRIST

Every layer of a dad's life is redeemed and elevated through grace, the sacraments, and union with Jesus Christ. "I am the vine, you are the branches." John 15:5

### MICROCHANGE, LEADS TO SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE. Edward L. De La Loza



#### 1. AWARENESS

Examine your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in light of faith and your evolving values.



#### 2. MICROCHANGE

Make one small, deliberate change in a thought or behavior aligned with virtue and your vocation.



#### 3. CONSISTENCY

Repeat the microchange daily. Small actions, rooted in grace, build new habits.



#### 4. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

Over time, small changes compound into lasting transformation of character and life direction.



#### 5. LEGACY

You live in alignment with your values, forming disciples and leaving a legacy of faith.



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Faith formation is job one

Equipping Catholic dads to lead their families with faith, courage, and conviction.

REFLECT. DISCERN. MICROCHANGE. LEAD. LEAVE A LEGACY.



EDUCATE



EQUIP



ENCOURAGE



EMPOWER

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