CROSSROAD
PARENTING NETWORK

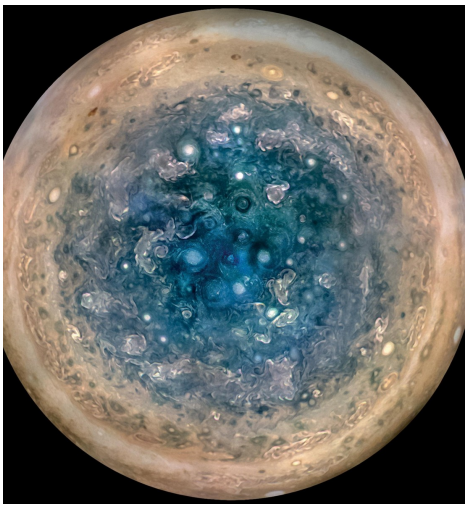
Faith, Freedom, & Formation

Tensions in Orthodox Parenting

CrossRoad Institute · October 2026

1 in 3 Orthodox parents say they have been made to feel unwelcome in church because of their children's behavior. Yet questions about how children should behave—and how faith, freedom, formation, authority, and obedience fit together—can be confusing; there are so many opinions! While behavior matters, our deeper goal is not to control children but to guide them toward communion with God and others. We don't grow Orthodox faith in a child by forcing them to believe or act a certain way, but by supporting their encounter with God through and in the Orthodox Church.

Think about faith as a STAR generated by the reaction of two swirling "gases"….



The two "gases" are:

- **God's self-revelation**
  - in all the places it is captured for us in the Orthodox Tradition
  - In all the other places the Holy Spirit chooses to show Himself
- **Our own capacity for engagement, encounter, experience**

The more the "gases" come together to react and fuse, the brighter the STAR shines, and the more light is experienced and sent out into the universe. **God provides His revelation; your child provides their capacity to engage.**

So what's your role, as a parent, grandparent, godparent, church school teacher, clergyperson, or invested parishioner? You help build the ATMOSPHERE. Reactions happen best in certain atmospheres, under certain conditions.

What ATMOSPHERE supports the FAITH reaction, whether in the home, the classroom, or the parish? **An atmosphere of love, freedom, and intentional formation.**

Image: "Southern Storms" (PIA21641), NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, May 25, 2017. Enhanced image by Betsy Asher Hall and Gervasio Robles based on images provided courtesy of NASA/JPL-Caltech/SwRI/MSSS.
https://assets.science.nasa.gov/content/dam/science/psd/photojournal/pia/pia21/pia21641/PIA21641.jpg

Why love?

- Love is Christ's law for us.
- Love is pragmatic; Love draws a person in, whereas a harsh response (even about something "correct") pushes them away and erodes trust.
- Love requires freedom; God does not compel our love.

Why freedom?

- Orthodox anthropology proclaims all human beings are made in the image of God, who is free.
- Freedom is pragmatic; All children will be free agents eventually, best start to prepare them now.
- Freedom is not a free-for-all; freedom requires formation.

Why formation?

- Human beings don't arrive "finished"; growth and the need to be guided and formed are human reality.
- Formation is pragmatic, because formation happens regardless. Children will be formed; the only question is by whom or by what?
- Formation is everything we do to intentionally bring the two "gases" together, to make it possible for children to encounter and experience God's self-revelation.
- Formation requires we assume authority over and responsibility for children, shape their environments and influences, guide them into maturity and cultivation of their capacities, and make our own faith, joy, humility, and obedience to the Lord and one another present to them, as inspiration and a model.

We do not raise children to behave Orthodox—we raise them to BE Orthodox, to have faith and live in communion with God and their fellows.

Resources

Webinar Recording

Faith, Freedom, & Formation: Tensions in Orthodox Parenting
Watch on YouTube

Book Recommendation

Our Church and Our Children by Sophie Koulomzin

Upcoming Webinars

Tuesday 11/3/26, 5:00PM PT / 8:00PM ET
The Human Animal: A Christian Lens on Child Development
Register Here

Tuesday 12/1/26, 8:00-9:00PM ET
Training A Branch: Christian Formation As A Million Tiny Moments
Register Here

About the CrossRoad Parenting Network

The CrossRoad Parenting Network brings Orthodox parents together for conversation, encouragement, and practical support. After two years of listening to parents and Christian educators across jurisdictions through focus groups, surveys, and ongoing conversations, CrossRoad is sharing what we've learned about the realities of Orthodox parenting today. Together, we're exploring the questions families are actually asking, learning from the wisdom and experiences of Orthodox parents and leaders, and helping one another nurture a living faith in the next generation.