

SUMMER 2024

ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER



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GREAT LAKES
CONFERENCE
BRETHEN IN CHRIST

A quarterly resource to equip and support congregations in the Great Lakes Conference of the Brethren in Christ for the work of growing lifelong disciples within their faith family and surrounding community.

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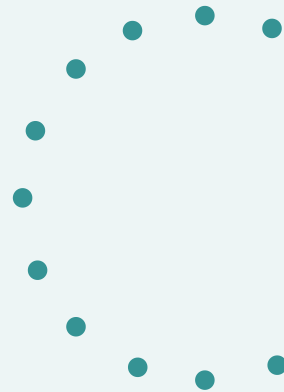
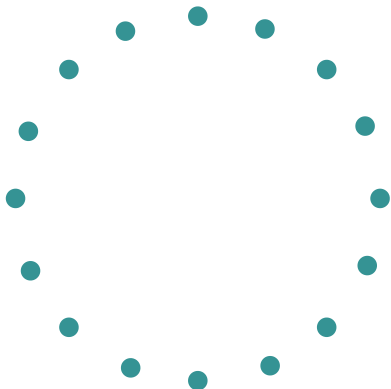
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CHILDREN & YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP

Back To School: Discipleship Through The Years

Students are getting ready to head back into their classrooms for another year of school and for many parents, our contact with them is decreased to chaotic mornings and busy evenings. Even if you homeschool, the introduction of schoolwork into the mix can make times a little busier than normal.

Below are some intentional ways parents/caregivers or ministers can connect with students throughout the school year in a variety of ways that will help keep them grounded with faith and family.



PRESCHOOL/KINDERGARTEN

The Kissing Hand is a book where a little raccoon is nervous about being away from his mom on his first day of school and she kisses the palm of his hand and tells him that if he is feeling scared or lonely, he can press his palm to his cheek and feel her love with him.

We can do this for our kids as well and one way to connect it to faith would be to draw a heart and a cross on the palm of their hand and say, "If you miss me, you can look at your hand and know that I love you and that Jesus is always with you."

ELEMENTARY

When serving as a Children's Pastor, I would go to a local public school and eat lunch with a bunch of "my" kids from church. At the beginning of the year, I gave the kids frog pencil toppers and told them whenever school gets tough to remember that they could "Fully Rely On God." I bought a big bag of small plastic frogs on Amazon to take with me when I have lunch with the kids. When I come to visit, I give each kid a frog to remind them to fully rely on God. And often, other kids would come sit with them so they could get a frog too!

We probably invited more kids to church in that shared lunch than in most of our outreaches, all because of some plastic frogs and some really great kids. I think this would be great for parents/caregivers to do as well as ministers – it's a way to connect that is tangible and experiential.

CHILDREN & YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP



COLLEGE STUDENTS.

When our kids grow up and head to college, it can often be an “out of sight, out of mind” scenario. But that is to our detriment. While those students may not return to our building, our heart is always to help them stay connected to the church.

Ways we can do that:

- Pray over and send each student out with a blessing. One church I know puts together blankets which they also pray over and send with the student in college.
- Connect each student with a church “pen pal” who will organize the sending of care packages and notes to the student while they are away.
- Check in with the parents and parents/caregivers, check in with your church. Pray for and support one another.
- Make a big deal out of homecoming visits.

Acknowledging their visit and letting them know how much they are loved and missed will speak volumes to a sense of community and belonging.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Middle school – just hearing that can immediately strike a chord of terror in many hearts. Whether it is because you are reflecting back on your own experience or dreading the fact that your child is now entering or in that phase, the middle school era carries with it some unique challenges.

Consider making space for some intentional conversations or weekends away to help them find space to connect with their parents/caregivers and process the new things they are learning or experiences. A few ways to make these intentional conversations meaningful:

- Build the excitement – Let middle schoolers know that there’s a plan to get away or to connect. It will mean so much to know they are being prioritized.
- Give over (some) control – While there may be specific things a parent/caregiver might want to address, offer space for the middle schoolers input and let them direct the conversation as they feel comfortable.
- Offer a tangible reminder – A gift, like a watch or a necklace, that can help them re-connect to their conversation and to the love and faith shared at that time.
- Have FUN! – Fun is how this age learns. Creating space for connections to be made in a place of joy will help them to be solidified in their hearts and minds.

HIGH SCHOOL

In 2017, Dr. Richard Ross, a professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, asked that question. Specifically, he states, “The issue really is not: How is our youth group doing today? Instead, the core question is: How will our youth group be doing for a lifetime?” In answering that question, he proposed three needs that must be met for the goal of making disciples to be achieved.. His “ministry in thirds” consists of..

- Parents/Caregivers who adore Jesus, love the church, and are actively on mission.
- An integrated community of believers where old and young interact in relationships and worship.
- A Bible-drenched peer group who actively live out the gospel together.

As the school year ramps us, it may be tempting to reduce time spent together with the faith community. Understandably, new jobs and sports activities may become a challenge. But work with high schoolers to find a way to compensate if regular gathering times can’t be maintained.



FAMILY FAITH FORMATION

TIME FOR DISCIPLESHIP AT HOME

One thing parents often say to me when I am talking about discipleship in the home is, “How?” The following explanation goes something like this:

We are so busy (tired, full schedule) that we are barely home (awake, together) and when we are, we just want to rest (relax, watch TV) not try to have church (do a family devotion, have a faith talk).

And after that is usually something like, “I know that’s not right but I just don’t even know where to start.”

I feel that, I truly do. Our family like many of yours also lives a busy life. Until recently, all of us, from the youngest to the oldest were full-time students, in five different schools, doing activities ranging from archery club to student newspaper to president of the student body. Our calendar is a veritable rainbow of appointments, events, and practices.

And the thought of having to add something else to it, especially something as intentional as a family devotional time or a faith talk, can feel absolutely overwhelming.

It’s at this point though that it is tempting to say, “Forget it. The kids will just have to get the Jesus stuff at church.” And that kind of thinking leads to a relinquishing of our unique responsibility to raise our children in the faith as well as a willingness to overlook the very real fact that parents, not ministers, have the greatest influence on their child’s faith whether they are intentional about it or not.

May I offer another way of thinking?

Could it be that when the charge to “impress these things upon your children” was given in Deuteronomy 6, it wasn’t a just call to family devotions? That perhaps what God had in mind was a bit more involved than that?

What if instead of adding another thing to our calendar, we sought for ways to intentionally invite Christ into what we are already doing?

What if instead of saying, “There’s no time to do more” we started saying “We are going to let God do more with our time.”

In that famous Deuteronomy 6 passage, there are four discipleship moments mentioned: Getting up in the morning, going to bed at night, sitting down at home, and leaving the home (along the road). Throughout the world, these things happen every. single. day. We all wake up, we all sleep, we all sit, we all go.

I find it so interesting that these are the times that God said, “Talk to your kids about Me.” The most ordinary, normative moments of the day become extraordinary moments to disciple our kids in the faith.

So, back to that original question of “How?”

By simply inviting Christ into your calendar, into each moment, into each activity. It starts with just one comment, one reflection, one pause to turn our focus from the temporal to the eternal.

At a workshop I once did for family ministers, I had people write down some everyday activities they do during these four moments. For instance, what do they do each morning when they wake up? Then I asked them, “Now consider, how can you invite Jesus into those moments?” A lady piped up, “I don’t think Jesus can join me while I brush my teeth?” I challenged her to get creative and see if there was anything she could think of to invite Christ into that most ordinary moment.

A few months later, I bumped into her and she said, “Oh, I just have to tell you. I took you up on your challenge. I had the idea to start writing Bible verses and encouraging notes to my family and using post-its to hang them on the mirror in the bathroom. Now every day when they brush their teeth, they are reading God’s word to them for the day. We all do it now. It’s become a ‘thing’ in our house. Thanks for pushing me to think about how to invite Christ in.”

Wow. Brushing teeth as discipleship. If there could be a more mundane, non-spiritual activity on the planet, I can’t think of what it would be. **And yet, when Christ is invited into that space, it becomes extraordinary.**

What about us? Where in our daily lives can we invite Christ in? Could we talk about a verse as we drive to soccer practice? Could our dinner conversation open doors to discuss how God loves us and lives through us? Could movie night be a chance to impress God’s commands upon their hearts? Could God meet us as we tuck our kids into bed each night?

Discipleship at home isn’t about doing more; it’s about inviting Christ into what you are already doing.

It’s about impressing the heart of God into our children’s hearts in the everyday moments so that being a Christian isn’t about going to church or managing sin or even reading the Bible but rather about living each moment with hearts turned to God and lives reflecting His love. It’s about creating disciples.

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time” Eph. 5:15, 16a (ESV)



INTERGENERATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP: SEVEN STRATEGIES

On Sunday morning at General Assembly, we had the chance to engage in All-Age worship where we were lead in worship by children, youth, and adults of all ages. What a blessed time it was to pray together, learn together, and share in praise of our Lord together!

Following that experience, a few pastors reached out to me for ideas on offering this type of opportunity at their own church. I hope that the resources here will be helpful in taking steps to allow that to happen. .

Often, our traditional service structures often make it difficult to extend the hand of welcome to the next generation and it can be difficult to maneuver within those confines and find ways of incorporating all generations.

With that in mind, here are some practical tips and tools for Intergenerational Worship Services that might be useful for your faith community.

- **Kid's Worship Team** – This team doesn't necessary lead "singing" but they worship through hospitality (holding doors, handing out bulletins, etc), prayer (they go forward during prayer time and pray for themselves and others) and generosity (they take up the communion and pray over it).I led this at one of the churches I worked at. For our team, the kids followed a weekly schedule, just like the adult worship team, and if they missed their Sunday, they had to get someone to take their spot. They also had to go through a training on worship with me before they could serve.
- **Sermon Notes** – There are a lot of great templates out there for sermon notes and for older kids, it's a great way to keep them involved with the service. In one church, if a child completed their sermon notes, they could get something out of a treasure box and the completed form was given back to their parents so the parents could have a follow-up conversation with their kids at home. I have a copy of the one we used at General Assembly if you are interested!

- **Shout Out to the Kids** – Kids love to get attention and they love when they get to be drawn into “adult” things like the sermon. We often asked whoever was speaking to at some point in the sermon just say something like, “Hey kids, have you ever seen this?” or something else that would be appropriate to the text to help draw the kids into the story. It’s amazing how just that little comment really drew them in and helped redirect their attention to the service.
- **Interactive Teaching and Learning** – Anything interactive is great! One of the ways our current church engages the kids is if there is a topic that involves a story from the Bible, the pastor will have the kids help act out the story. Everyone loves it – it’s spontaneous so things definitely go wrong, but the whole congregation gets involved and no one forgets the Scripture we studied that week. **Pastor Joy Brown** did a phenomenal job of providing an example of how to incorporate a children’s sermon as part of the Sunday morning experience that ministered to both adults and children. I don’t think any of us will ever forget the Christmas Island Crab!
- **Praise Packs** – Praise Packs or Worship Packets (sometimes called Busy Bags) get a bad rap, mostly because people don’t understand the developmental science behind them. Have “busy bags” but explain to parents and other church members that these activities aren’t intended to distract the kids but rather to help the kids use all of their developing senses; studies show if their hands and eyes are busy, their ears will be listening. Quiet activities like lacing cards, stickers scenes, foam craft kits, beads and pipe cleaners, small puzzles and coloring are all great ways to engage your kinesthetic and visual learners. In the Final Four Section, I’ve included the list of items we used at General Assembly
- **Pew Boxes**– Similar to , these boxes can be placed underneath chairs or pews and filled with quiet activities and books for kids to use during worship services. I love the ones put together by Traci Smith; you can find the description and link in the Final Four section.
- **Active Involvement** – The difference between “having kids in Big Church” and welcoming kids into corporate worship lies basically in participation. Are children being invited to actively participate or passively observe? Inviting children and youth to be part of the order of worship has incredible sway in creating a sense of inclusion and welcome. Children and youth can read Scripture, say the benediction, lead a song, and pray. Being involved signals that we have a place in the congregation – we are a part of something bigger – and everyone needs to know that truth. Many thanks to **Kara Kacmar** for the way she led all of us in worship with a variety of songs and ages during our Sunday service!

THE FINAL FOUR

ONE BOOK, ONE VIDEO, ONE WEBSITE, ONE RESOURCE

Generation Spark

The Bible Project

Generation Spark:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ3GE-GqQxU>

Generation Spark, an intergenerational church ministry, is building intergenerational relationships for the life of your church. This video offers a look into a church who engaged with Generation Spark and their experience with connecting generations.

Voices: Helping Our Children and Youth Listen to Wise Counsel written by Dr. Rich Griffith

This book provides a framework for evaluating the positive voices in our lives through the tests of time, transparency, and trust. This book helps explain the origin of the quiet, positive voices, as well as the loud, negative voices. It also explores thought-provoking, relevant-to-teens questions.

Traci Smith, Pew Boxes

<https://www.traci-smith.com/pew-boxes-for-interactive-worship/>

Traci Smith is an ordained minister and author of the Faithful Families series of books, which teaches simple and progressive faith practices to families. Her website is full of ideas on how to connect generations and discipleship at home. Each Tuesday she sends out a free email if you are interested in receiving weekly ideas. You can find the outline for Pew Boxes at the link above.

Praise Packs

Praise Packs are more than just coloring sheets to keep kids distracted long enough for the service to be over. They are tools to help invite kids to participate in the whole service, not just the children's moment designed for them.

The list pictured below include all the items we used at General Assembly. For a PDF copy, email Christina at christina@refocusministry.org

WORSHIP PACKETS

ITEM	PRICE	LINK
ACTIVITY BAGS	\$8.49/12	https://a.co/d/0735KtAp
PIPE CLEANERS	\$7.99/200	https://a.co/d/0jdCJOPJ
WOODEN BEADS	\$12.89	https://a.co/d/0dPYsnma
COLOR SCRATCH ORNAMENTS	\$8.45/24	https://a.co/d/068H1iLO
BIBLE STORY STICKER SCENES	\$4.95/12	https://www.amazon.com/Fun-Express-Make-Bible-Stationery/dp/B003FPU9LW/
FIDGET TOYS	\$14.99/24	https://www.amazon.com/LENDOD-Classic-24-Pack-Imagination-Multicolored/dp/B0CYX7ZYPN/
JESUS WALKS WITH US COLORING FOOTPRINT	\$6.99/24	https://www.amazon.com/Dvbonike-Christian-Religious-Footprint-Classroom/dp/B0CBK1CVR/
5 FINGER PRAYER HANDPRINT	\$16.49/30	https://www.amazon.com/MotiMind-Handprint-Religious-Supplies-Activities/dp/B0CZRW28L7/
MINI COLORING BOOK	\$12.99/24	https://www.amazon.com/Dvbonike-Bible-Coloring-Books-Religious-Inspirational-Sunday-School/dp/B0C3B61RPV/
MINI PACK OF COLORED PENCILS	\$18.99/234	https://www.amazon.com/Sharpener-Coloring-Portable-Sketching-Classroom/dp/B0CN2WCT5M

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Ready to take your ministry leadership to new heights? Join our 12-week program facilitated by Christina Embree, where you'll embark on a transformative journey alongside 4-6 ministry peers.

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- 🎟️ Lifetime 10% discount on all ReFocus seminars, workshops, webinars, and coaching packages.

Spaces are limited to 10 people, so secure your spot now and embark on a journey of growth, connection, and empowerment! Email christina@refocusministry.org to learn more or visit <https://forms.gle/6Sskfh57u5oqGyGW8> to enroll today. Let's make this summer a season of transformation together!



Family Faith Formation Curriculum

The heart of Family Faith Formation is families spending time together around the Word of God within the context of the larger faith community.

Many parents express frustration about the lack of support and equipping they experience when it comes to leading their kids spiritually at home. Churches often encourage parents that they are the ones who are called by God to disciple their kids but frequently don't provide the training, experience and resources needed for them to feel adequately prepared for that work.

Our Fill Your Toolbox curriculum gives parents what they need and churches what they desire. Each block contains five lessons focused on introducing, learning, and practicing specific discipleship strategies.

. **GLC/BIC 50% DISCOUNT APPLIES!! Contact Christina for Promo Code.**
Learn more at <https://refocusministry.org/family-faith-formation>



Training and Coaching Opportunities

DUE TO A GENEROUS SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE GREAT LAKES CONFERENCE, ALL COSTS HAVE BEEN REDUCED BY OVER 75% FROM THE ORIGINAL PRICE.

EVERYDAY DISCIPLESHIP

For parents/caregivers who desire to be intentional in the faith formation of their children, this webinar offers practices for daily discipleship at home.

\$50.00/webinar

INCLUDED:

- Unlimited access to all church members
- Personalized for your church
- Resources for the webinar and as follow-up for parents/caregivers

RECONNECT WEBINAR

ReConnect Webinar is designed for pastors and ministers interested in beginning to take steps to connect generations in ongoing spiritual formation and discipleship.

\$80.00/participant

INCLUDED:

- Groups of 4 or more
- 4 One Hour Workshops
- Resources/Handouts for during and after each workshop
- One 1/2 hour personal coaching session following webinar

PASTORAL TEAM COACHING

ReFocus coaching experiences help churches create missional communities focused on generational discipleship and spiritual formation. Through personalized mentorship, trainings, and coaching, ReFocus will help your church move into a deeper experience of community within your church family.

\$200-250 based on church size and needs



Resources compiled by Christina Embree
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The resources included in this resource packet are intended for use within local congregations. All resources are credited to their original source if not created by the compiler. Please follow all copyright laws when using the resources described here.