



YOUR HOME CHURCH

Practical Ideas for Spiritual Formation in Households



“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

~Matthew 18: 20

ALL CHILDREN & TEENS:

Using particular times when parents and children are together to make spaces for conversations: meal time, bed time, bath time, car time, waiting room time.

Participating as a family in worship and ministries, both in the church and in the home. Involving children in whatever parents are doing in relation to their faith.

Having visible, often-used religious objects, pictures, music and books around the home as a matter of course.

Letting children hear and see parents practicing and naming thankfulness, penitence, mutual forgiveness, appreciation of God’s gifts, intercession in times of anxiety. Using age-specific programming to give children the words and concepts they need to speak about and live out their religious faith, and then providing occasions for them to do so in worship and congregational life.

PRESCHOOL CHILDREN:

Introducing simple seasonal rituals, for example, Advent wreath, Christmas crèche, Epiphany crowns, Easter gardens, baptismal anniversary prayers, Lenten prayers, birthday prayers, graces, blessings and night prayers. Congregations could be resources for how to do this.

Creating a “holy corner” together in the home, using changing seasonal colors, pictures, objects.

Lighting candles at table before grace.

Incorporating Biblical stories and hymns into the family “repertoire” of bedtime stories and songs.

“Sabbath toys” to bring to church and play with at home only on Sundays (Noah’s ark, lion and lamb, Good Shepherd doll, miniature Communion set, Baptism set, doll with vestments).

“Baptizing” at bath time when a baptism is coming up at church.

Engaging small children in very concrete practices of sharing the things they enjoy most (foods, toys, etc) as a way to do family outreach. Baking cookies: “Some for us, and some for the children who have no homes.” Grocery shopping: “Now we have the food we need, so let’s choose some things to give to the food pantry, so another family can enjoy their favorite dinner.” Gift giving: “Now we’ve chosen a birthday gift for our friend, let’s choose another gift for someone who has no toys.”

Giving small children money for the Offertory and talking about that.

(Over)

SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN & PRE-TEENS:

Incorporating Bible stories and church history into family reading and conversations, especially around festivals.

Making sure children have a Bible and Prayer Book, referring to them when mealtime conversation demands.

Discussing what has been seen, heard, sung, learned at church.

Continuing with seasonal family rituals. Making them more elaborate, including children in choosing songs, reading Scripture, leading prayers, creating decorations. *Adding some rituals* that deliberately create a counterpoint with cultural practices, like special remembrances of the dead around Halloween, perhaps a family altar of memories. *Beginning to discuss* together how the family chooses to celebrate feasts where sacred and secular are inextricably entangled, notably Advent and Christmas. *Adding some more unusual feasts*, like Pentecost, to the family's "repertoire" of celebrations.

Involving children in family decisions about charitable giving, as they begin to learn math. *Encouraging children to choose the charities* to which they give money that is allocated as part of their allowance. *Encouraging children to undertake special projects*, perhaps with friends (for example, raising money to buy a Heifer Project animal). Helping children *use a newly-learned skill* (knitting, gardening, painting) on behalf of others.

Talking with children about the realities they encounter daily on the streets or in the news: war, poverty, homelessness. Framing these conversations in terms of "how our faith helps us know what God wants us to do." *Finding ways to raise up examples* of "good news" stories as examples of people living out their faith. Finding practical ways *the whole family can respond to concrete issues and needs*, by participating in a food bank, a soup kitchen, an event at a children's center, even a protest march. *Joining with others in the congregation* to do these things together.

Involving children in choosing or creating their own table graces and bedtime prayers.

Discussing the things children read, see and hear on television, or encounter in other media, in relation to questions of faith, ethics, justice, fairness etc. Encouraging children to ask themselves how what they see and hear fits or does not fit with "what our family/church believes." *Beginning to invite children to think* about their relationships with "people who are not like us," those of other faiths, cultures, backgrounds.

Children this age can be involved with their families or with "church friends" in events like congregational work days, hands-on outreach projects, liturgical leadership such as ushering, leading prayers, bringing up the Offertory.

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