

# Four Keys to Nurturing Faith in the Family

These four keys provide the arenas where spiritual growth in families and households may be nurtured. As they are embraced and practiced in the home, they open doors to other opportunities for faith development in the broader community and also serve as the means to strengthen congregational vitality through healthy, nurturing, faithful homes.

## Caring Conversation

Caring conversations express an interest in others, their hurts, their joys, their concerns and dreams, their values, their questions and their faith. Caring conversation requires a time commitment from both parents and children so that all members are available and ready to listen and to speak. Congregations are encouraged to assist families in finding ways to make this time possible. Families must be enabled to identify the “holy ground,” the holy times of their lives where precious, caring conversations take place and where lives are strengthened and nurtured by connecting with the love and mercy of God through the support, guidance and interest of others.

## Family Devotions

A devotional life is a way to practice the presence of God through the word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many families need assistance in discovering both how powerful a devotional life can be and how to begin and maintain this practice. Family devotions have the potential to bind generations together in faithfulness. This key fortifies the values that show how we as Christians operate from a different foundation than the rest of the world.

## Family Service

Serving one's neighbor is the calling all are given through the life and message of Jesus Christ. Service is a concrete expression of one's own faith and values and is a reflection of the love we have first received from God. Family and inter-generational service projects have been shown to be a vital way to pass on faith from generation to generation. Children and youth are greatly influenced by what they see modeled in the lives of others, especially parents and other family members.

## Family Rituals and Traditions

Rituals and traditions are those patterns of behavior that can be expected to occur on a routine basis and communicate meaning in life. The way family members greet each one another each day, table graces, bedtime prayers, blessing of a child at birthdays, baptism or anniversary celebrations are all examples of family rituals and traditions that serve as foundations and opportunities for faith nurturing. As these special times are developed in the family, they become family traditions which shape expectations and enhance a sense of belonging.

# It Can Happen!

## Oodles of Ideas for Nurturing Faith in Your Family

*It Can Happen* is a companion piece to the *Four Keys*. These ideas represent a starting place. Brainstorm with your family and congregation for additional ways for faith nurturing to happen naturally in the family setting. Space has been left in each area for you to add ideas.

### Caring Conversation

- Talk about Sunday Morning Worship service. Ask open-ended questions and then listen.
- Be available, anytime, anyplace to listen.
- Put down the paper, turn off the TV, and look each other in the eye!
- Use materials and discussion questions from Sunday school materials to initiate conversations about faith topics. The Gather 'Round *Talkabout* is designed for this. Ask your Sunday School superintendent how to get it.
- Talk about how you make big decisions such as buying a new computer or car, relocating, or getting a different job based on how you live out your faith.
- Tell stories about your conversion experience, baptism and other pivotal moments in your faith development.
- Encourage extended family members to share stories about their lives and how their faith impacted them along the way.
- Sit and talk at the table together during and after a meal.
- Use current events or your community and the world (war, school shootings, banned books) to converse about how a person's faith can serve as a guide for behavior and decisions.
- Tell jokes and humorous stories to each other.
- Talk about difficult situations kids might be facing and help them come up with new options.
- Send a postcard or letter to family and friends near and far; parents, tuck a note or scripture verse in their bookbag.

### Family Devotions and Worship

- Prepare a family worship center as a focal point for prayer, silence, Bible stories. Change the visuals according to seasons of year or special holidays.
- Do regular family Bible Study, or simply read the Bible out loud. Take turns.
- Ask each person present to offer a sentence prayer.
- Practice regular bedtime prayers and reflections time.
- Celebrate the church year with special table center pieces. All family members can contribute to the design/display/creation.
- Learn to sing meal graces together, from the hymnal, from church camp, or create your own.
- Use meal-time prayers as a time to pray for neighbors, playmates, school friends, church folks.
- Put Christmas cards in a basket and have a different family member pull one out each evening, then pray for them and their family. This can also be done with photographs you

receive throughout the year, or pray through the church directory.

- Keep your church bulletin or newsletter on the table and offer prayer for concerns listed there.
- Connect with a service or missions worker, read about them and pray for them.
- Visit a bookstore for ideas to buy or check out prepared family devotional books, or check them out of the Western District Conference Resource Library at [www.mennowdc.org](http://www.mennowdc.org).
- Have an "old fashioned" devotional time, where the scripture is read from a grandparent's Bible and in their language. Sing a hymn typical of that time as well. If possible, have grandparents present!
- Visit a cathedral or synagogue or worship with another denomination.
- Remember to have devotions and prayer even when company is present who may not have this practice in their own home.
- Learn and do a table grace your grandparents used, in that language.
- Have one evening a week when you only thank God for the blessings of that day (no requests!)
- Walk around your house, yard, neighborhood together as a family and pray audibly or silently as you go. Include prayers of thanks, blessing and petition.
- Meet with another family on a regular basis to eat, talk, pray and share stories.
- Go on a parent-child spiritual retreat.

## Family Service Projects

- Volunteer as a family at a regional Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) warehouse/thrift shop. Or collect and assemble school or refugee kits.
- Sponsor a family through a refugee service. Pray for them, learn about them and their culture.
- Invite another family to join you on a service project.
- Clean up the ditches together!
- Offer to help an elderly person prepare their yard/house for winter or do spring clean up.
- Sponsor a needy family at Christmas time. Buy and wrap gifts together as a family.
- Shop for supplies for a refugee or school kit together. Ask each family member to contribute to cost.
- Work at the MCC Sale!
- Buy at the MCC Sale!
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Help clean up after disaster strikes - do Mennonite Disaster Service together as a family.
- Plan your vacation so you can stop and participate in a service project along the way.
- Talk about money issues. Encourage your children to tithe a portion of their allowance/earnings. Balance a checkbook or pay bills together.
- Support the projects your congregation and denomination are organizing.
- Send a care package to college students, missionaries or voluntary service workers.
- Offer to provide baby-sitting/childcare for another family.
- As a family, prepare and deliver a meal to a new family in the community or to a child's Sunday

School teacher, pastor, etc.

## Family Rituals and Traditions

- Celebrate special days with extra effort: flowers, songs, banners, special foods.
- Offer prayers of thanksgiving and blessing on the birthday of all family members.
- Use the best china, dress up the dining room for special days.
- Light a candle at meal time or during Bible reading to signify the presence of Christ.
- Re-tell stories on special days...story of a birth, a baptism, a spiritual birth.
- Read from journals that have been kept to record a person's life story.
- Do a special activity that recognizes the changing of the seasons.
- Use an advent calendar or advent wreath as you prepare for Christ's birth.
- Have a family reading time and read books about Christian role models, biographies or issues that you can discuss.
- Hug each other as you leave for school, work each morning and as you return each night.
- Say something lighthearted to each other each day - like *...you are my sunshine; God bless you real good today; I'm blessed to be your dad, mom, etc.*
- Establish special evenings or meals to be celebrated monthly or weekly...salad Sunday, pizza night, picnic, game night, when the TV, computer and phone are off limits.
- Begin a Faith Chest when a child is born. Add items to it each year on birthdays or at important milestones such as going to school, baptism, getting driver's license. Each item should have significance to individual and family as well, and the ritual of presenting the item should be connected to faith nurturing.
- Serve special meals on certain occasions.
- Choose and donate a book to your church library in honor of a family member's birthday.
- Read the same book together every summer/Christmas, etc.
- Have every family member sign their own names on birthday, anniversary, etc. cards.