



December
2011

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children's spirituality

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devotionals

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worships with
Colombians

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immigrants

*Keep these
words that I am
commanding
you today in
your heart.
Recite them to
your children
and talk about
them when you
are at home and
when you are
away, when you
lie down and
when you rise.
—Deut. 6: 6-7*

Scattered Seeds

Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word

—Matthew 13



Sarah, Jeremiah & Ben Schlegel. Photo by Lynelle Mellady

Parents are the first spiritual teachers

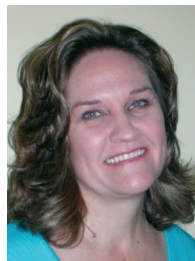
How does the congregation equip parents to nurture faith at home?

by Shana Peachey Boshart

Conference Minister for Christian Formation

We have heard it said that "Faith is caught more than taught." Parents are the first and most influential spiritual guides that children have. They are role models, teachers and mentors in faith. A school teacher or youth pastor will readily agree that the values, beliefs and behaviors of parents shape children more powerfully than any other influence in a child's life.

How then can churches equip parents with the things they need to do such crucial work? In



this issue, we'll explore the answers to this important question.

We'll begin by thinking about how children experience God, then present practical ideas parents can begin to implement right away to nurture faith at home.

How Children Connect with God

Children are all different and have different ways they experience the world and prefer to worship. David Csinos suggests four specific ways children experience God. They are Word, Emotion, Symbol and Action.



Word. Some children focus on finding the correct words to express their ideas about faith. Their faith grows through knowledge about God, and they highly value the scripture as “the Word above all words.” Their goal for spiritual growth is clarity of understanding about God.

Emotion. Some children focus on experiences that help them feel close to God. Their faith grows by feeling a potent connection with God, and they value the way art, drama, and especially music help them experience this connection. Their goal for spiritual growth is personal spiritual renewal.

Symbol. Some children focus on the mystery of God. Their faith grows through abstract impressions of God in symbols, metaphors and images as well as through silence, imagination, nature and beauty. Their goal for spiritual growth is union with the transcendent, ineffable God.

Action. Some children focus on acting in obedience to God. Their faith grows by actively working to bring about the peace, reconciliation, justice and righteousness God desires. Their goal for spiritual growth is to create the change that God wills for the world.

When working with children at home or at church, it is helpful to keep in mind these four ways of knowing God. By using activities that appeal to all four ways, we are assured that every child will have their faith nurtured. To learn more, see the Fall 2010 issue of *Lifelong Faith Journal* (www.lifelongfaith.com) or David Csinos’s book, *Children’s Ministry That Fits*.

Practical Ways to Nurture Faith at Home

Many parents would like to nurture faith more intentionally at home but don’t know how to go about it. *Growing Deeper* is a free resource for parents that gives handles on how to nurture faith at home. Find it at www.centralplainsmc.org. Vibrant Faith Ministries (www.vibrantfaith.org) also offers practical handles on how to do this with their “Four Keys”: Caring Conversations, Devotions, Service, and Rituals and Traditions. Not only are these practices proven ways to nurture faith in children, they keep parents grounded and growing in faith too!

Caring Conversations

As in Deuteronomy 6, caring conversations happen “along the way,” during the routine moments of life. Ask yourself, “Where is the holy ground of our family life?” In other words, where do you have those conversations with your children that create opportunities to hear their hearts and share your faith? Some common answers are in the car, at the dinner table, at bedtime, while working together, or while on vacation together.

When you have identified these places of holy ground for your own family, be alert for opportunities for caring conversation.

One practice that many families have found helpful is to ask every evening, “Where did I experience God’s love today?” and “When did God’s love seem absent?” This practice opens faith



Ella, Jeremy, Oliver and Stacey Waltner. Photo by Jeremy Waltner

conversations and is an excellent habit. The *Growing Deeper* resource includes more advice about this practice.

Family Devotions

Set aside a special time every day or every week for family devotions. Read a short passage from the Bible, reflect on its meaning together, reflect on how it applies to your lives, and say a prayer together. Devotions don’t need to be long or complex. Yet, this is the most difficult of the Four Keys for most families to implement. There are many reasons: lack of models or know-how, discomfort and lack of time, to name a few.

But really, it is a simple question of setting our priorities and making intentional choices. Jesus taught that we cannot serve two masters. We follow Jesus because the abundant life he offers cannot be found in the over-busy hustle and bustle of hectic lives. On the next page are three excellent family devotionals to choose from.

Family Service

Service is a concrete expression of our 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.

Families can make and deliver meals to others, help the elderly or disabled with chores or home projects, buy and deliver

food for a food pantry, invite new neighbors for a meal, volunteer at a homeless shelter, participate in church service projects and many other acts of service.

Service continues to shape a family's identity as a family of faith because the memories of the service stay with the family long afterward.

Rituals and Traditions

Rituals and traditions are those patterns of behavior that occur on a routine basis and communicate meaning in life. The way family members greet one another each day, mealtime prayers, bedtime prayers, birthdays, and holidays are all opportunities for family rituals and traditions that can nurture faith.

Parents set the tone and can make careful choices about what they will say and do at each of these times. Parents can ask themselves, "How does the way we celebrate birthdays bless our child as God's beloved?" or "How do our Christmas traditions reflect our values and beliefs?" You can even think about the simple but meaningful things you say when your child wakes up in the morning or returns from school each afternoon.

One tradition to consider is a weekly Family Night. Have a meal together, do a devotional, play games or bake something to share with others...the possibilities are endless. And so are the benefits!

Pulling it all together

Family service projects are a great way to nurture faith in Action-centered children, and rituals and traditions are particularly helpful to Symbol-centered children. Word-centered children will appreciate reading the Bible during family devotions and pondering its meaning. Emotion-centered children will be nurtured by caring conversations that take into account their feelings.

Hopefully, parents now have more practical ideas on nurturing faith at home, and church leaders have some resources to share with families. See the list at right for resources and where to find them.

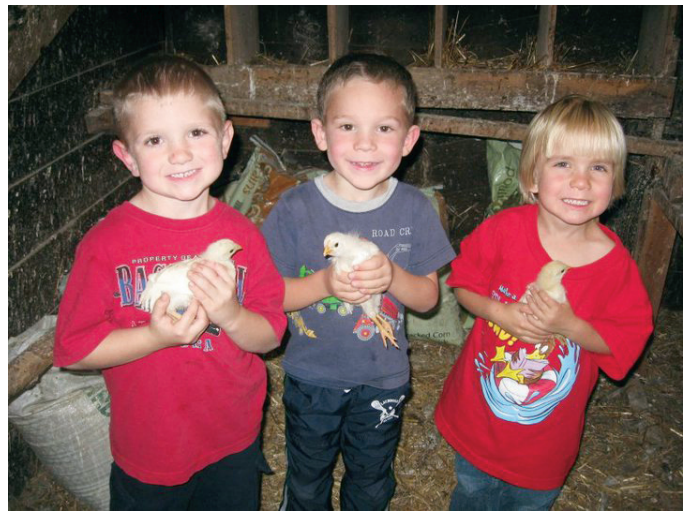


Photo by Cheryl Peachey Stoner

Three fabulous ideas for family devotions

The first two are definitely more economical if bought by the congregation and distributed to parents who want them.

Talkabout. Even if your church does not use the Gather 'Round Sunday School curriculum, you can use the downloadable *Talkabout* at home. Read the Bible story together and use the suggested activities and questions on a daily or weekly basis. Order at <http://store.mpn.net>.

Taking Faith Home. Designed as half-sheet bulletin inserts for every week of the year, this resource gives parents daily Bible readings, prayers and ideas for activities for each of the Four Keys (see page 2). Daily Bible texts follow the Revised Common Lectionary. One \$50 CD covers the whole year and can be shared with all of your congregation's families. Order from www.vibrantfaith.org.

Advent and Lent Devotionals. Every year for Advent and Lent, there are family devotions and activities that accompany the worship resources found in *Leader* magazine. This is a free download at www.mennonitechurch.ca/resource-centre. Can be used daily or weekly with children of all ages.

For further reading

Frogs Without Legs Can't Hear: Nurturing disciples in home and congregation by David W. Anderson and Paul Hill, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2003.

Children's Ministry That Fits: Beyond one-size-fits-all approaches to nurturing children's spirituality by David M.

Csinos, Wipf & Stock, 2011.

It Can Happen! Oodles of Ideas for Nurturing Faith in Your Family by Marlene Bogard at www.centralplainsmc.org. Click on Christian Formation.

Lifelong Faith Journal www.lifelongfaith.com



The newsletter of Central Plains Mennonite Conference is published six times a year at Kalona, Iowa.
Editor: Shana Peachey Boshart. Editorial Council: David Boshart, Tim Detweiler, Roger Farmer, Blaine Friesen, Susan Janzen, Sherilyn Ortman. Thanks to Verna Zook, Susan and Sherilyn for proofreading.
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For the February issue, please send stories, news and photos by **Friday, January 6** to the address above.
Please send subscription requests and changes of addresses to office@centralplainsmc.org.

Printed by Kalona Graphics in USA

www.centralplainsmc.org



Marlene's Top Picks

Check out these books from the Western District Conference Resource Library. Simply call 316-283-6300 or email crlib@mennowdc.org and they will mail it to you. To see other resources, use the online card catalog at mennowdc.org/library.

Forming Faith in Children

Images of God for Young Children by Marie-Helene Delval. Beautiful book shares a colorful illustration and a brief description of the character of God as a rock, fire, covenant, justice, mercy, Savior and more.

Praying in Color: Kids Edition by Sybil MacBeth. Introduces the simple way of praying through the use of crayons and markers.

Forming Faith in Youth

Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens by Bass and Richter and *Transforming Prayers: 40 unique experiences for youth ministry* by Jenny Baker. Each one includes a scripture, overview, ideas for additional visuals and creating the setting.

Forming Faith in Families

The Gather 'Round *Talk About*, published quarterly and really cool! Multiple ways to keep households talking about their faith and life. Order at <http://store.mpn.net>.

Forming Faith in Adults

A Faithful Future: Teaching and learning for discipleship by Carol Krau. *Reframing Spiritual Formation: Discipleship in an unchurched culture* by Edward Hammett.

—Marlene Bogard, Director, WDC Resource Library



Florence & Gary Dunker enjoy the company of Solomon Ortman (left) and Abram Winings.

Keep kids safe with Circle of Grace

by Jeanette Harder and Carol Knieriem, Dove's Nest

The foundation of nurturing faith in children is a safe environment. The children and youth in our churches want to be safe; we want them to be safe too. The *Circle of Grace* curriculum helps to open channels of communication between adults and children and youth in your congregation about this important subject. *Circle of Grace* is a supplement to your current Sunday School curriculum. Lessons are self-contained and grade-specific, with one to four age-appropriate lessons each year for children and youth in preschool through Grade 12. The curriculum is available in English and Spanish. It is provided on CD, and it includes training and an implementation checklist.

Thanks to a generous donation, *Circle of Grace* is available to Mennonite Church USA churches for no charge. Visit the Dove's Nest website (www.DovesNest.net) for an overview of the curriculum and to request a copy of the *Circle of Grace* curriculum for your church. For information, email CircleOfGrace@DovesNest.net.

Um...What are you talking about?

Someone recently asked me to explain the term "Christian formation." Christian formation refers to our ongoing growth and development as disciples of Jesus Christ. The term reminds us that discipleship implies a lifelong journey of transformation in which we imitate Jesus Christ with the goal of becoming more and more like Christ.

In the past, we spoke more often of "Christian Education," a term that evokes school-related imagery such as a classroom, teacher, reading and writing. The word "formation" indicates an awareness that we are formed in Christ in all kinds of settings and through many more practices than those found in a classroom.

When we talk about formation, we often focus on Christian practices: things that we do to deepen our relationship with God and follow the Way of Jesus. A few examples of Christian practices include prayer, Bible study, forgiveness, repentance, confession, communion, foot-washing, hospitality, giving to those in need, service, leadership, reconciliation and testimony.

—Shana Peachey Boshart

Forming faith from oldest to youngest

The rich fellowship of the Bruderschaft Sunday School class

by Margalea Warner, Correspondent

The oldest attending member of First Mennonite Church (FMC) of Iowa City is Grace Nachtigall. She is 97 years old. The youngest member is Desmond Plank, who reached four months October 30. That Sunday his mother, Emily Plank, proclaimed a message on the saving power of community with him carried in a snuggly sack in front of her.



Desmond Plank



Grace Nachtigall

Grace is a member of the FMC Sunday School class that calls themselves the Bruderschaft class. *Bruderschaft* is a German word for brotherhood but this class embraces both brothers and sisters in Christ. Formed about 50 years ago, it started as “the over-40 club” and began with mostly married couples. More recently, the class reached out and welcomed a wide range of ages spanning over 50 years, with many singles, some widowed, some never married.

The older members have passed on the history they have lived through, including what it was like to be conscientious objectors doing alternative service during times of war. They remember the hardships of the Great Depression and the ways the country churches reached out to city people with generous gifts of food.

The class uses the Uniform Lesson Series. They take the daily Bible readings very seriously, despite challenges some have with vision and hearing. Their teacher, Kevin Kummer, who is in his early 50’s, says they are a joy to teach because they combine gathered wisdom with fresh teachability.

He asked them what words they would have for a young disciple. “Give and receive forgiveness,” Jeanette Christner said. “Be a leader by listening to God as much as you talk to God,” said Clara Gingerich. “Give thanks in all things,” Orpha Kemp said. Grace Nachtigall declared, “I’m grateful for health and strength. I’m glad I’m able to be here.” Carolyn Turvey, mother of elementary aged children, values their openness to seekers.

Maria Kummer, Kevin’s wife, said that these senior saints model faithfulness in prayer. She credits the class’s prayers for undergirding the Kummers’ ministry with Intervarsity Graduate Christian Fellowship.

“Sometimes they feel they can’t do much,” says Maria, “but they still pray. Prayer is doing something. Something important! When they say they will pray for you, you know they will do it.”

Wood River church worships with Columbians via skype

by Cloy Roth, Wood River Mennonite Church member

In October of 2003, I was invited to travel with a delegation from Central Plains to the Mennonite Churches of Colombia and Ecuador. On that trip, I met Pastor Martin Gonzalez, who at that time was the pastor of La Mesa Mennonite Church in Colombia. That encounter began an informal relationship between La Mesa and the Wood River (Nebraska) Mennonite Church as sister church families. Through the years since, we would light a candle for our sister church each Sunday morning, share prayer concerns, and most years either send gifts for the children and youth at Christmas or donations to purchase them there. In 2008, Pastor Martin felt God calling him to minister to the displaced persons of Colombia, estimated to be two to three million at that time. After prayerful consideration, he resigned his position with the Mennonite Church, and he with his family embarked on that journey.

The Wood River church continued to support them. A group of 20 to 30 people now meets in the Gonzalez home. On Sunday September 25, 2011, we used our Sunday School hour to have a joint service via Skype with the group that meets in Pastor Martin’s home. Each group sang, a Wood River men’s group sang a song, each pastor shared a prayer, and each pastor gave a 15-minute devotional. The service was translated by Susan Combs, who has been a missionary in Colombia for more than 30 years and has known Pastor Martin since he was 11 years old. We ended our time by singing together “Allelu, Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia, Praise ye the Lord,” in rounds, where we took turns sitting and standing as we sang our parts. It was a grand time of worship and fellowship! Comments from both groups were very positive. It gave each group a close-up picture of worship in another culture.



LEADERSHIP

Leaders Credentialed

Mark-Peter Lundquist was licensed towards ordination November 6 at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Mark-Peter is the vice-president of outreach for Urban Ventures in Minneapolis, a faith-based, non-profit organization providing children, youth and adults a safe place to identify and overcome obstacles, discover faith and be empowered to make positive life choices.

Leader Transitions

Gordon Scoville was installed as transitional pastor at Wood River Mennonite Church, Wood River, Nebraska, on September 11.

Steve Nelson was installed as associate pastor at Lower Deer Creek Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa, on October 2.

On the Web

Stan Harder, a member of First Mennonite Church, Lincoln, Nebraska, participated in a Christian Peacemaker Team at Grassy Narrows reservation in Kenora, Ontario, in September. He has written the story of why he went and how it impacted him, and you are encouraged to read it. Find it on our web site at www.centralplainsmc.org/Ministries/Outreach_Service/CPTStan-Harder.

Young adults invited to retreat

by Jerry Kroeker, Director, Swan Lake Christian Camp

Swan Lake Christian Camp, Viborg, South Dakota, is hosting a Young Adult Winter Retreat during the Christmas break for people post-high school to approximately age 26. We are pleased to have Christian Hip-Hop artist Adam Sieff as our speaker. The retreat begins Sunday, December 18, at 4 p.m. and concludes around 1 p.m. Tuesday, December 20.

Our goal is to facilitate a worship time for people who are in a transition time of their lives either because of continuing education or jobs. We recognize that some young people are scheduled for work regularly on Sundays because they are the ones most recently hired. Others struggle to find their own church family in a new community. For the span of a couple of days, we want to create a space for spiritual growth, perhaps rekindling a fire that once burned more brightly.

I know for myself that during these years, my biggest challenge to my relationship with Christ was my own busy schedule. So, we invite everyone in this age group to gather at Swan Lake for a time of spiritual renewal, for reconnecting with friends, and for the games and hot cocoa!

To register, email programdirector@myslcc.com.

Grappling with rural sustainability

by Angela Widmer, Program Director, Crooked Creek Christian Camp

Join us as we discuss the “Myth of Sustainability” at our Exploring Foods and Farming Event on March 2-3, 2012, at Crooked Creek Christian Camp near Washington, Iowa. While there is endless discussion in mainstream culture about “going green” and “sustainable practices,” many are left wondering what sustainability really means. As a committee gathered to discuss a theme for the Exploring Foods and Farming event, we realized that defining sustainability was not only important, but vital, as what we believe about something directly impacts our actions.

We also discovered that this conversation led us to many other questions: Are any of us really sustainable? How do sustainability and stewardship go together? How do we build bridges between conventional and alternative farmers and create space for conversation about how to care for the land God has given us in a way that is unifying, not divisive? How do we *grow together as community* even while we disagree?

Mark your calendars and join us as we dive into conversation about what sustainability is, what it means for our lives, and how to live together with different understandings. You don’t want to miss this! Look for more information to come by watching our website: www.crookedcreekcamp.org



Rhoda Keener leads a session of Sister Care for Central Plains women.

Story and drama yield skills for care-giving at seminar

by Carol Janzen, President, Central Plains Mennonite Women

“This is Sister Care!” we exclaimed as we shared an “ah-ha” moment around the circle listening, encouraging, sharing, crying, laughing and hugging. We were at a Sister Care Seminar September 17 and 18 at Swan Lake Christian Camp, Viborg, South Dakota. Presenters Rhoda Keener, co-executive director of MWUSA, and Carolyn Heggen, a psychotherapist specializing in trauma recovery, led the weekend as we together explored ways of caring for ourselves and for each other.

Through scriptural drama, personal stories told from the heart, and facing our own life story, we were gifted and empowered with skills for caring and listening to become a healing presence and the hands and face of Jesus for others. We journeyed through the Sister Care manual together, challenged by the exercises and equipped with resources.

On the lighter side of the weekend were joyful singing, casual nature walks, creative crafts, and relaxing massages. We departed with this closing blessing, “Go now with the assurance that you are God’s beloved daughter and called to be a living blessing to others. Amen.”

Immigration Training offers help to churches and immigrants

by Holly Blosser Yoder, Outreach & Service Committee

Three from Central Plains conference were among the 38 people who underwent a 40-hour training at Akron, Pennsylvania, September 6-10, 2011, to prepare church leaders and others to walk alongside immigrants in their churches and communities as they navigate the complexity of US immigration law. Coming from three different states, Rosie Epp of Sermon on the Mount in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Margie Mejia-Caraballo of Templo Alabanza in Moline, Illinois; and Rachelle Luitjens of Sugar Creek in Wayland, Iowa, participated in the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Basic Immigration Training.

Participants described the training as “intense” in their reports. Both Epp and Luitjens said that they hope to use what they learned to better inform churches about the myths and realities of immigration and to inform immigrants of their legal rights. Caraballo puts her training to work regularly as a volunteer under the supervision of an attorney, helping immigrants to fill out paperwork.

Epp described the church’s responsibility to immigrants in a September 19 MCC press release. “Immigrants are our neighbors. To provide them with accurate information is part of our responsibility to ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Caraballo, who is active in immigration issues in her community, has observed that Mennonites are ahead of other groups with which she interacts “in terms of having a statement, a letter, and having resources.” In addition, conference support for training demonstrates that “it’s not only a verbal commitment [to care for immigrants], but there’s action behind it.”

Each of the three participants received a service grant from Central Plains Mennonite Conference to help with the cost of this event. To read their full reports, see the Outreach & Service section of the Central Plains website at www.centralplainsmc.org/Ministries/Outreach_Service/Service_Grants/2011_Immigration_Training.

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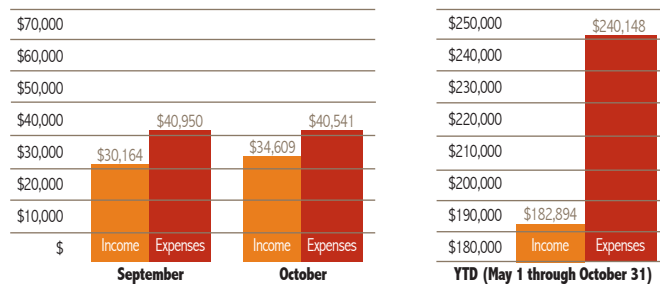
Can we reverse this trend?

The graphs illustrate a financial snapshot of Central Plains Mennonite Conference at the end of October. As shown, we continue to experience a large deficit half-way through the fiscal year.

Income (\$182,894) is at 37% of the blueprint (\$492,379). Expenses are at 49% of the blueprint (\$492,379). As a result of lower-than-expected income levels, there is a deficit of \$57,254.29.

—Stewardship Task Group

Central Plains Mennonite Conference Income vs. Expenses



FYI: COMING EVENTS

Young Adult Retreat, Sunday through Tuesday, December 18-20, 2011, at Swan Lake Christian Camp, Viborg, South Dakota

Central Plains Annual Meeting, Thursday through Sunday, June 28 – July 1, 2012, at Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, NE

Youth Escape 2012, Friday through Sunday, August 3-5, 2012, at Hidden Acres Christian Center, Dayton, IA

Growing in
holistic witness
to God's
reconciling mission
in the world through
fellowship,
discipleship
and leadership

An area conference of



**Mennonite
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USA**