

Plan for a Congregation's Christian Formation of the Young Child

The following congregational plan for the Christian Formation of the Young Child considers families and children across four stages of marriage and family development: (1) pre-marriage through birth of the first child; (2) birth through age 1; (3) child ages 2-4; (4) child ages 5-6. Congregational ministry to families through these stages is considered in terms of four "quadrants" of family ministry:

Pastoral: Providing pastoral care and support for families and family members in their primary relationships; strengthening families through enrichment programs; supporting families in periods/stages of crisis or significant stress.

Educational: Educating families in ways that enhance their relationships; forming faith in family members through Christian education and experiential learning (in both age-specific and cross-generational contexts); supporting and equipping the home through education as a primary context for faith formation.

Communal: Developing the congregation as a welcoming "second family" for families and family members; enabling intergenerational relationship-building and faith sharing within the congregation; connecting families with families for mutual support and interaction.

Celebrational: Ministering to families through the corporate worship life of the congregation, including through preaching, prayer and the exercise of hospitality; marking significant "milestones" events in the lives of families through worship; creating worship experiences that are parent and child friendly; actively involving whole families in worship; connecting the corporate worship life of the congregation with the practice of faith in the home, providing related resources for use in the home.

A Corrective Note:

A significant contemporary reality is that a large proportion families with children in post-industrial society do not have the form of the traditional nuclear family i.e. two married parents with children. Grace-centred family ministry meets these families "where they are", calling them forward to experience and grow together in the grace of Jesus Christ. Such ministry is responsive to the particular concerns, issues and stresses upon a wide variety of family types, including single parent families, families formed or augmented through adoption and families separated through divorce. Thus while the following congregational plan for the Christian Formation of the Young Child is set in the language of the "nuclear" family, it must be contextually tweaked to serve the needs of all parents and children whom God gives us to love and serve.

Ministry with families: Pre-marriage to birth of first child

Some Key Family Developmental Tasks

- ❖ Preparing toward and establishing a mutually satisfying marriage.
- ❖ Reconfiguring relationships with extended family.
- ❖ Developing supportive relationships as a married couple.
- ❖ Adjusting to pregnancy and the promise of parenthood.

Pastoral	Educational	Communal	Celebrational
<p>Requiring pre-marital counselling as a prerequisite for all marriages under the auspices of the congregation.</p> <p>As part of the marriage preparation process, having couples covenant to take part in a follow-up counseling session six months after marriage to "check-in" on various issues.</p> <p>Building a resource bank at the church for marriage support and enrichment; providing newly married couples with a list of printed and professional resources to assist them in strengthening their marriage.</p>	<p>As part of all pastoral and communal ministry to families in this stage, emphasising the importance of developing the four faith disciplines of: caring conversation, rituals and traditions, service and devotion. Also including a focus on practical skills development (e.g. praying together as a couple, doing devotions together) and on the development of a vision and goals for family life.</p> <p>Making available to parents of the bride and groom a brochure talking about their adjusted roles as parents, with advice for appropriate support of the newly married couple.</p> <p>Offering a Pre-natal class incorporating with the "medical" introduction to childbirth a focus upon the spiritual development of infants and the challenges of family transition from the pre-child to with-child stages of life.</p>	<p>Linking each recently married or soon-to-be-married couple with another couple who can act as "marriage mentors" for them, committing to pray for and keep in touch with them.</p> <p>Building a community of newly married couples e.g. offering a "just married" group. Some focus could be given in such a group to development of skills and practices for marriage wellness. Long-time married couples in the congregation could be invited in to share something of their experiences in married life.</p>	<p>Worship Milestone Event #1: Recognising the formation of a new marriage relationship in congregational worship following the return of the couple from their honeymoon. Blessing the couple and giving them the gift of a family altar "starter kit".</p> <p>Worship Milestone Event #2: Marking first wedding anniversaries at two worship services each year, inviting all eligible couples to attend. Hosting an anniversary dinner event for couples with guided conversation to enable reflection on the struggles, joys and hopes of married life.</p>

Ministry with families: Birth of first child through age 1

Some Key Family Developmental Tasks

- ❖ Having, adjusting to, and encouraging the development of infants.
- ❖ Developing basic parenting skills and competencies.
- ❖ Tending to the marriage relationship in the context of great changes and additional commitments.
- ❖ Coping with a sense of loss of the pre-child lifestyle, while consciously choosing a new lifestyle pattern.
- ❖ Establishing a mutually satisfying balance of roles and responsibilities as parents.
- ❖ Developing a network of support, advice and encouragement for the early parenting task.
- ❖ Intentionally developing basic routines for healthy family life, including the sharing of faith in the home.
- ❖ Developing a sense of individuated family identity as a new family-with-children.

Pastoral	Educational	Communal	Celebrational
<p>Pre-Baptism Home Visitation: a team of lay members visit the family in their home to welcome the new child and inform the family of the congregation's baptismal ministry.</p> <p>Post-birth support: provision of a family meal once-a-week and fortnightly house-cleaning help during the first 2 months of the child's life.</p> <p>Scheduled post-birth visits by congregational sponsors to "check in" with the family. ** Congregational sponsors continue to make regular contact through at least to the time of First Communion.</p>	<p>Baptism Classes for parents of children who are being baptised: focus on the meaning of baptism and the practice of the Four Keys in home life.</p> <p>Sunday school class for parents and 0-1s. Focus upon teaching prayers and songs that can be used in home through their guided use in these times. Provision of take-home stage-appropriate resources for parents.</p> <p>"You're a Grandparent Now!" Classes offered for new grandparents, helping them think through their new role in the lives of their children and grandchildren.</p>	<p>Provision of congregational sponsors for all baptised children of the congregation, in addition to other baptismal sponsors where these do not belong to the congregation.</p>	<p>Worship Milestone Event #3: Baptism of the child. Congregational gift to the child e.g. faith chest, blanket.</p> <p>Worship Milestone Event #4: Anniversary of Baptism. On 'Baptism of our Lord' Sunday all those baptised in the past year are gathered with their family and sponsors.</p> <p>A special focus is given to infants at Christmas time, with a gift for Baby's First Christmas.</p> <p>Developing worship as an infant friendly space e.g. rocking chairs, age-appropriate activity bags, designating a "safe place" in the sanctuary (e.g. a large playpen) where mobile 0-1 year olds can crawl during the sermon time.</p>

Ministry with families: Child ages 2 through 4

Key Family Developmental Tasks

- ❖ Adapting to the critical needs and interests of preschool children in stimulating, growth-promoting ways.
- ❖ Tending the marriage relationship in the face of energy depletion and lack of privacy as parents
- ❖ Developing healthy patterns of child discipline within a law-gospel framework.
- ❖ Accessing resources and relationships outside the family in the wider community.
- ❖ Developing methods, rituals and traditions for faith sharing appropriate for this age-level.
- ❖ Adjusting to the possibility/reality of the addition of more children to the family.

Pastoral	Educational	Communal	Celebrational
<p>Parents Night Out: On a monthly basis evening child care is provided at minimal cost, allowing parents to have a "date night" together.</p> <p>Congregational Playgroup meets one morning per week, including a half-hour "FaithTime" session where children and parents spend time apart. Parents focus each week on one aspect of parenting as a Christian.</p> <p>Training and accreditation of childminders from the congregation is conducted, giving parents a list of trustworthy and reliable childminding options. These persons are also used to provide free assistance in emergency situations.</p> <p>Twice-yearly 'Time with Just Mum' and 'Time with Just Dad' social events are offered for 2-4 year olds and their respective parents.</p>	<p>Sunday School classes are provided for 2-3 year olds and for 4 year olds. The 2-3 class is a parent-and-child class, while the 4 year old class is kids only. Weekly take-home pieces are provided.</p> <p>Two levels of 'Faith and Skills for Parenting' classes are offered each year (Basic and Advanced). Child care is provided if necessary.</p> <p>Parent-child sessions are offered in relation to each of the Worship Milestones, centred around the Four Keys or faith disciplines.</p> <p>A resource library of age-appropriate childrens media and parenting resources is made available for parents to use.</p>	<p>4 intergenerational congregational events with age-appropriate activities (e.g. crafts, songs, story-telling) are held during the year: for Advent, Lent, and Pentecost and a fourth during August. These events are closely linked to the ongoing practice of faith in the home.</p>	<p>Worship Milestone Event #5: 'Your Church' for 2 year olds and their parents as they begin the Sunday School journey. Following worship a family-friendly luncheon is offered and kids are given an experiential tour of their church.</p> <p>Worship Milestone Event #6: Prayer, for 3 year olds and their parents. A gift of a childrens prayer book and a prayer pillow is provided</p> <p>Worship Milestone Event #7: Worship, for 4 year olds and their parents. Children help lead worship and learn about worship with their parents in 2 related sessions.</p> <p>A Children's Time is included in each worship service. Age-appropriate Activity Bags are available for children to use during worship. Seats up the front of the church and booster seats are also offered to families with children this age.</p> <p>"Pew Parents" are linked to families with children aged 2-3 to assist with care during worship.</p>

Ministry with families: Child ages 5 through 6

Key Family Developmental Tasks

- ❖ Managing the transition of children from preschool to school.
- ❖ Establishing family-sensitive boundaries for participation of children in social and community activities.
- ❖ Fitting into the community of school-age families in constructive ways.
- ❖ Encouraging children's ongoing spiritual, educational and social development.
- ❖ Adjusting to the possibility/reality of the addition of more children to the family.

Pastoral	Educational	Communal	Celebrational
<p>As children move into elementary school, a workshop is offered to parents to help them think issues of transition, and ways of supporting the education of their children. Parents are also introduced to the '40 Assets' and are invited to take part in a family goal-setting process built around the 40 assets.</p> <p>A before-and-after-school program is offered to assist working parents with children at elementary school.</p> <p>Twice-yearly 'Time with Just Mum' and 'Time with Just Dad' social events are offered for 5-6 year olds and their respective parents.</p> <p>As for families with 2-4 year olds: 'Parents Night Out' Childminding services.</p>	<p>Sunday School classes are provided for 5 and 6 year olds as part of a Rotation Model. Parents are invited to participate as workshop leaders/helpers. Take-home pieces are provided to support faith-sharing in the home.</p> <p>Parent-child sessions are offered in relation to each of the Worship Milestones, centred around the Four Keys or faith disciplines.</p> <p>As for families with 2-4 year olds: 'Faith & Skills for Parenting'. Resource library.</p>	<p>As for families with 2-4 year olds: Intergenerational Events</p> <p>As an alternative to Sunday School, families with elementary age children are invited to participate in an all-family Sunday School experience, with families clustering together for faith sharing and growth.</p>	<p>Whole families are involved in various aspects of worship: e.g. ushering, taking the offering, leading prayers.</p> <p>Sunday School classes are regularly involved in worship e.g. greeting, leading songs, presenting drama or puppet shows, clowning, gospel processions.</p> <p>Worship Milestone Event #8: Recognition of commencing elementary school.</p> <p>Worship Milestone Event #9: Big Bible Stories, for 5 year olds and their parents. Gift of Beginners Bible to family.</p> <p>Worship Milestone Event #10: Family Serve, for 6 year olds and their parents.</p> <p>As for families with 2-4 year olds: 'Childrens Time' in worship. Activity Bags</p>