

Tending the Baptismal Journey

Pre-Baptismal Preparation and Nurture of the Baptised



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The baptism of a child is an amazing, wondrous work of God that brings together an infant, his or her family, baptismal sponsors (or Godparents), pastor and congregation into a communal journey of learning and sharing in faith. Central to this journey is the making and keeping of promises. In the presence of God and the congregation, parents and sponsors make promises both on behalf of the child, and to the child. The congregation, in turn, makes promises to both child and parents. And all of these promises are caught up in the promise making and keeping of God, who ties himself to the child in the Water and the Word, adopting the child as his own and giving the child new and eternal life in his Son, Jesus Christ.

The communal nature of baptism profoundly shapes the church's practice of ministry to the baptized. Baptism is never a "private" event. In infant baptism, a child is incorporated into the body of Christ, and the whole body is therefore a "participant" in that baptism. Nurturing the baptismal faith of a child becomes something of concern to the whole body, and each part is called into loving service of the other in that divine calling. Family, sponsors, pastor and congregation are united by God as partners in ministering to the baptized child.

Baptism is not just an infant blessing, a life-cycle rite affecting the baby and his or her immediate family, but an incorporation into the body of Christ. The wider gathered community represents more adequately the entire body of Christ, the whole communion of saints, into which the child is being baptized. On the one hand, it is important for the baby's family and godparents to realize this larger community claims their child – both so that they may take seriously the communal nature of living the faith and so that they may experience the community's support in the task of rearing a child in the faith. On the other hand, it is necessary for the congregation to realize how it is implicated in the child's baptism, for a rite of passage into a community is a rite of passage for the whole community. The whole community is called to change in response to each individual baptized, whether child, adult or infant. It must be ready to make room for new persons, to listen respectfully to them, to nurture them, to accept the new challenges and critiques they present, and to grow them in the encounter. [Ramshaw 1995: 7]

This understanding of baptism as communal promise-making and promise-keeping strongly underpins the vision for baptismal ministry outlined in this paper. Baptism is always baptism into community (including the divine community of the Holy Trinity). Tending the baptismal journey of those whom God enjoins to us at the font is a communal task and calling.

Pre-Baptismal Ministry

Commonly, baptismal ministry to an individual begins with a contact from his or parents. This contact, in turn, usually occasions an appointment between pastor and parents to begin a process of pre-baptismal preparation, conducted by the pastor for and with the parents.

An understanding of baptism as communal suggests a somewhat different approach. From the very beginning it is preferable that the baptismal ministry to parents and child is an expression of God's imminent adoption of the child into his family, the church. The initial follow-up of a baptismal inquiry is best done through an intergenerational team of laypersons, trained and supervised by the pastor. A home visit to the family of the baptismal candidate would provide opportunity for getting to know the family and its needs. During the visit the team would also present a gift to the family from the congregation (the *Building Blocks of Faith* calendar is ideal for this) and communicate the congregation's baptismal ministry process and policy (including guidelines for selection of sponsors/Godparents). The Youth and Family Institute's proposal of a "Baptism Visitation

Team” envisions an expanded role, both up to the baptism (e.g. attending the pre-baptismal instruction classes, “hosting” the family on the day of the baptism, photographing and videoing the occasion) and beyond [see **Appendix**]. In the longer term the “Baptismal Visitation Team” commits:

to praying regularly for the family, visit the family in the home at four different milestones in the family’s life, and stay in contact with the family. Each time the [Baptismal] Visitation Team visits the family in the home, they bring gift for the family to help them nurture faith in the child or youth’s life. [cf. Appendix].

The second step in the congregation’s baptismal ministry process is teaching or instruction of the candidate’s family on the meaning, implications and use of baptism. The centrality of the Sacraments to the office of the ordained ministry requires that the pastor be the prime instructor.

While such instruction could involve only the parents of any particular candidate and the pastor, it is best done in *group* settings, with multiple sets of parents and congregational members. The designation of particular “baptismal dates” in the church year with associated baptismal classes is in view here (see later re: the association of baptism with key church festivals). Each pre-baptismal class should be viewed as an opportunity for congregational hospitality, symbolising the lavish hospitality of the great Host of baptism. A meal could be provided for the families concerned, together with childcare options for parents with additional, older children. The benefits of a “class” approach are at least threefold: (1) it emphasises the communal nature of baptism; (2) it helps parents of the baptismal candidates develop relationships with others in the congregation, including other parents of young children; (3) it may give rise to continued gatherings of parents for mutual support and sharing.

The importance of pre-baptismal instruction (consequent upon the importance of the sacrament itself!) suggests a relatively “high demand threshold”: children should generally not be baptised unless each parent of faith is willing and able to attend the classes. Parents who have been through the process on account of previous baptisms should not be automatically exempt. Indeed, Ramshaw suggests that most parents especially welcome pre-baptismal classes the second or third time, due to their ‘growing awareness that parenting has to be worked at. The second or third time, they have a whole new set of questions about the religious nurture of small children’ [1995: 9]

The purpose of pre-baptismal instruction is to explore the meaning and function of the sacrament, and its relation to daily life and to the faith formation of children in the family and in the congregation. A three session pre-baptismal instruction program could be based on the following outline (estimated 2 hours per class).

Session One: Theology of Baptism

A. Introductions / Relationship Building

- B. Baptism as a means of grace (*Texts: Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:16, John 3:5-6, Acts 2:38-39, Acts 22:16, Rom. 6:3-11, Gal. 3:27, Col. 2:11-13, Titus 3:5-7, 1 Pet. 3:21*).

- C. Baptism as initiation into God's family (Texts: John 1:12, 1 Cor. 12:12-13, Eph. 4:4-6, Eph. 5:25-27, 1 Pet. 2:9).
- D. Why do we baptise infants? (Texts: Matt. 18:3-5, Luke 18:15-17)
- E. "Baptism is for using": its meaning and power for daily life.
- F. *Toolbox*: Simple prayers to pray with your child.

Session Two "Baptising and Teaching": The Role of the Family and the Faith Community

- A. The promises made at a child's Baptism.
- B. The importance of faith practices within the home: introducing the "Four Keys".
 - Caring conversation
 - Rituals and traditions
 - Devotional practices (worship attendance, use of Scripture, use of Catechism, prayer)
 - Service
- C. The importance of the congregation in nurturing Baptismal faith.
 - Worship (and worship with young children)
 - Christian education
 - Marriage and family ministries.
- D. The vocation of Godparent.
- E. The emotional, spiritual and moral development of children in the first year of life.
- F. *Toolbox*: Simple songs to sing to your child.

Session Three: The Liturgy of Baptism

- A. The rite of Baptism (Schubert 1994: 2-14)
 - *"Born sinful and unclean"* (*ibid.*: 2)
 - *Task of parents and sponsors* (*ibid.*: 3)
 - *Rebuke of unclean spirit* (*ibid.*: 4)
 - *The sign of the cross* (*ibid.*: 4)
 - *Use of Lord's Prayer and Apostle's Creed* (*ibid.*:6-9)
 - *Baptism in the Triune name* (*ibid.*: 9)
 - *Anointing with oil* (*ibid.*: 9-10)
 - *Task of the congregation* (*ibid.*: 13)
- B. The symbols of Baptism.

- *Candle*
- *Baptismal garment*

C. Planning for the ceremony of Baptism.

D. *Toolbox*: Simple blessings to say to your child.

Given that the pre-baptismal classes are focused primarily on parents, an additional intergenerational event could also be offered prior to the Sunday of the baptism for all family members of candidates (including youth and children of all ages), grandparents, Godparents and various congregational members (the Youth & Family Institute's *Child in Our Hands Milestones: Intergenerational Enrichment* resource provides an outline for such an event). This would help to further emphasise the importance of baptism for Christian living and to concretise the "communal" nature of baptism.

A pastoral home visit to particular families following the conclusion of the pre-baptismal classes might also be necessary in some instances to follow up on outstanding questions and details.

Resources

Anglican Church of Canada (National Children's Unit), *Gift for the Journey: A Baptismal Preparation Kit*, Toronto: ABC Publishing, 1993.

Building Blocks of Faith: For Christian Parents of Very Young Children, Minneapolis: Youth & Family Institute, 2001 (fourth printing).

John T. **Conrad**, *What Do Lutherans Believe About Baptism?*, CSS Publishing, 2001.

Daniel **Erlander**, *Let the Children Come: A Baptism Manual for Parents and Sponsors*, 1997.

Oddbjorn **Evenshaug**, Dag Hallen, Roland Martinson, *Parenting with Purpose: Nurturing Faith and Life from Birth to Age Six*, Minneapolis: Youth & Family Institute of Augsburg College, 2001.

Richard **Jungkuntz**, *The Gospel of Baptism*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968.

Martin **Luther**, *The Small Catechism*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986 translation.

Martin E. **Marty**, *Baptism*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962.

Richard A. **Melheim**, *Welcome to the Family: For Parents Whose Child is About to Be Baptized*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989.

Shirley K. **Morgenthaler**, *Right from the Start: A Parent's Guide to the Young Child's Faith Development*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001.

Becky Schuricht **Peters**, *Building Faith One Child at a Time*, St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997.

Anne Neufeld **Rupp**, *Growing Together: Understanding and Nurturing Your Child's Faith Journey*, Newton: Faith & Life Press, 1996.

Edmund **Schlink**, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, trans. by Herbert J.A. Bouman, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972.

David **Schubert** (ed.), *Church Rites*, Lutheran Church of Australia Commission on Worship, Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, 1994.

Marilyn **Stalheim** & Alice Stolper Peppler, *Child in Our Hands Milestones: Intergenerational Enrichment*, Minneapolis: Youth & Family Institute, 1999.

Website: www.faithkeepers.com

Appendix: 'Steps for Training a Milestones Visitation Team'

Godparents/Sponsors

While the role and function of sponsors or Godparents is frequently minimised in modern church life, their theological significance in baptism is profound. In dealing with the question of how an infant could be said to have or gain faith through baptism, Martin Luther pointed to the faith of 'sponsors and of the church' in "gaining" faith for the baptized. In his 1525 sermon on Matt. 8:1-13, Luther declared that: 'in baptism the children themselves believe and have their own faith, which God effects in them *through the sponsors*, when in the faith of the Christian church they intercede for them and bring them to baptism. ... Children are not baptized in the faith of the sponsors or the church; but *the faith of sponsors and of the church prays and gains faith for them, in which they are baptized and believe for themselves*' [Lenker 2000: 84, 85].

Godparents/sponsors not only have theological but catechetical significance. As we have noted, bringing up a baptized child in the faith is not just a responsibility of the parents, but of the whole Christian community. However, as Ramshaw suggests, 'the baptismal charge, while it needs to be placed on the whole community, will not be fulfilled unless it is *institutionalized* in individual relationships' [1994: 48]. Godparents can serve as significant non-parent adults to encourage baptised children in their faith, and to remind parents of their promise to provide for the Christian nurture of their children.¹ Through supporting the ministries of Godparents, congregations can deepen the baptismal nurture of the children in their midst.

Ramshaw proposes four approaches to helping Godparents realise and carry out their responsibilities and for promoting the Godparent role [1994: 49-50]:

¹ Cf. Ramshaw 1994: 48-49 for a "defence" of Godparenthood.

1. Help parents to make good choices of Godparents for their children.
2. Help Godparents develop a concrete understanding of how to live out their role as the child grows up.
3. Make sure each Godparent does something active in the baptismal liturgy.
4. Increase visibility of the Godparent role in the daily life of the church.

Ramshaw suggest that 'meeting with the Godparents at least once should be a high priority' [9]. Aspects of "Godparent training" could include how to communicate with a child, how to remember baptism together, and how to nurture a long-distance relationship. Congregations might also take a "long term view" of the Godparent ministry, putting in place a process for ongoing contact and support (e.g. a congregation might keep and maintain a Godparent database, making regular contact with godparents to remind them of their calling, and to support and resource them in its fulfilment).

The visibility of the Godparent role in the daily life of the church can be enhanced by making it a "subject" of congregational prayer and liturgical ritual. Members could be 'invited to speak or bring to the minister petitions "for your family members, Godchildren or friends" when they are in need of prayer' and the Godchildren of congregational members could be 'regularly included in the church's prayers as a group' [1994: 50]. Additionally, one Sunday a year, or one Sunday every three-year RCL cycle, could be given a Godparent focus. All Godparents could receive a blessing on such a Sunday, and Godparents and Godchildren "pairings" within the congregation could be gathered for an intergenerational enrichment event.

There is also, I contend, a strong case for augmenting parent-selected Godparents with *Congregational Godparents*, where none of the former belong to the congregation. The "induction" of Congregational Godparents could take place at any point in a child's life (e.g. a family with older children joining the congregation could be provided with Congregational Godparents).

Resources

Richard & Hazel **Bimler**, *A Word to My Sponsor*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1998.

Elaine **Ramshaw**, *The Godparent Book*, Liturgy Training Publications, 1994

Elaine **Ramshaw**, 'Rethinking the Role of Godparents', *Word & World*, Vol. 14/1 (Winter 1994), 43-50

Elaine **Ramshaw**, *Sponsors and Baptism: A Worship Handbook*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.

The Baptismal Service

The rite of baptism itself provides a significant opportunity to enact the significance and meaning of baptism. Taking baptismal ministry seriously means using all means to “make the most” of what the baptismal service offers to (a) affirm all baptized members in the grace of their baptism and their practice and exercise of it in daily life; (b) emphasise the communal nature of baptism and the implications of this. On the other hand, adopting a “minimalistic” approach to the rite (i.e. doing the “bare bones” or failing to integrate the baptism with other parts of the service) both “sells baptism short” and undercuts pre-baptismal instruction. As Wagner observes, ‘instruction concerning the benefits of baptism will bear little fruit where congregations celebrate baptism in a minimalistic way’ [1997: 105].

Firstly, the baptismal service should emphasise the communal implications of baptism. Congregational members can be involved in a variety of ways both in the ritual itself and in responding to the ritual. As part of the ritual, members can fill the font with water, present candles, clothe baptised infants with baptismal garments, give greetings and prayers and present the child to the congregation. In response to the ritual, members can remember and affirm their own baptisms, and sign each other with the “watermark” of the cross.

Secondly, the rite of baptism offers various options which function to deepen the symbolism of the sacramental event. These include the rebuke of unclean spirit, the opening of ears and mouth, the presentation of a candle, the clothing of the baptised infant in a white garment and the anointing of the baptised with oil.

Thirdly, baptism can be an occasion for “gift giving” from the congregation to the family of the baptised child. The Youth & Family Institute’s suggestion of a “Faith Chest” as a congregational gift connects the rite concretely to the future catechesis of the child in home and congregation. The baptismal rite might also lead into a congregational “gift” of a reception or a party for the family, relatives and friends of the baptised following the service (another opportunity to integrate the baptised child and his or her family into the wider community of the congregation).

Strong consideration should also be given to celebrating congregational baptisms on key “festivals” in the church year e.g. Baptism of Our Lord Sunday, Easter Vigil, Pentecost or Trinity Sunday, Reformation Sunday. Ramshaw suggests that doing so helps to restore baptism ‘to its proper place at the heart and center of the community’s liturgical life’ [1995: 7]. Integrating baptismal ministry with the congregation’s preparation for such major festivals provides opportunity for:

church leaders and the community as a whole to become involved deeply in the whole process of preparing people for baptism as the communal celebration of baptism. ... The community could be involved in praying for all involved. The celebration of the baptism itself could be fuller in terms of the use of baptismal music and art. [1995: 7]

Celebrating baptisms in the context of festivals may also serve to deepen people’s understanding of baptism as a ‘dialogue is established between baptism and the central dynamic of faith, to which the festivals draw us’ [1995: 7]. Finally, concentrating the congregation’s pre-baptismal preparation around key church festivals would allow for ‘more elaborate pre-baptismal meetings’ through a cross-fertilisation of ritual and meaning [1995: 7].

“What’s Next?”: Helping Children Grow in the Grace of Baptism

A Cause to Reflect ...

In general ... we do better on preparation than we do on follow-up. Most pastors and congregations leave parents and children pretty much to themselves after the baptism, until the children are old enough for some form of Christian education. The assumption is that if the child is too young for any level of formal education, the congregation has little or no direct contribution to make to its nurture. Much more attention could be paid to the religious formation of very young baptized children. Classes and support groups for parents of babies and toddlers can include explicit attention to the spiritual dimensions of parenting young children: the formation of patterns of family prayer and storytelling, strategies for helping a little child participate in communal worship, the Christian motivation for listening respectfully to a child. [Ramshaw 1995: 9].

Infant baptism gives all of God’s gracious gifts to the baptised. In one sense, then it serves as the “end” from which all of the Christian life flows and the “end” to which it returns again and again. But in another sense, baptism is a “beginning”. As Mueller & Kraus emphasise, ‘the Lord’s commission’ concerning baptism ‘comprises two parts, baptizing coupled with teaching’ [1990: 89]. Baptism, ‘though singular and efficacious without our own doing, is a never-finished process. It will ‘continuously be appropriated’ through the teaching of the inexhaustible mysteries of faith [Schwarz 1988: 29].

The inseparable connection between baptism and teaching means that the church does not baptise infants without (a) the reasonable expectation that they will be taught the faith in and through their home environment; (b) attending to its own calling to support the family in its catechetical role; and (c) purposefully augmenting the family’s role through its own worship and Christian education endeavours.

With respect to (a), the church:

does not baptize all children it can reach, but only children of Christian parents. Furthermore, the church does not baptize children in isolation, but as sons and daughters of Christian parents, and as members of Christian homes. Infant baptism cannot be separated from the context in which the infants and their parents stand. Thus, we are not talking here about an isolated child and an isolated baptismal act. [Schwarz 1988: 28]

The rite of baptism [Schubert 1994: 3] clearly identifies the parents of the baptismal candidate, in partnership with the baptismal sponsors, as the primary catechists. There are 6 components to the promise made by parents and/or sponsors in the rite:

- 1) Remember him/her in your prayers.
- 2) Bring him/her to the services in God’s house.
- 3) Teach him/her the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandments.
- 4) Remind him/her of his/her baptism.
- 5) Set him/her a good example.
- 6) Provide for his/her instruction in the faith.

These six elements provide a ready framework for the congregation’s ministry in support of parents of the baptised, and for the congregation’s own catechetical efforts through worship

and Christian education programming. The baptismal promises of parents make clear what is to be taught. It is not merely any Christian “content” but what Wollenburg terms the ‘three divine mysteries’: the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. The baptismal life is to ‘be shaped and given form by these three mysteries’ [2000: 16]. They are not to be merely taught in a formal sense, but woven into the fabric of home life and congregational life through prayer, worship and conversation. Within the home:

Father and mother are to pray these three mysteries in the presence of the child, so that the child will learn to say a priestly “Amen” to the prayers of father and mother. The baptismal life is to be given shape and form as father and mother teach the meaning of these “mysteries” in the daily conversation of the home. [2000: 16]

The remainder of this paper will consider two forms of baptismal ministry used in congregations that endeavour to fulfil the commission of Christ to his church to go both ‘baptizing ... and teaching’ (Matt. 28:19-20).

Cradle Roll Ministry

Many congregations have in place some form of “cradle roll ministry” to baptized children and their families up until the time of the child’s entry into Sunday School. Components of such a ministry may include:

- Regular newsletters on childhood development and care, including questions of spiritual nurture.
- The gift of a “Growth Calendar” to track a child’s growth, including spiritually.
- The gift of a CD or cassette tape of “bible songs”, together with laminated word sheets for parents to use.
- Providing parents with simple prayers, blessings and devotional templates on laminated cards, for use at the meal table, bedside and rocking chair.
- Providing “recommended resource” lists to families (e.g. the Youth & Family Institute’s *Faithlife in the Home* resource guide).
- Sending Baptism Birthday cards and resources for the celebration of baptismal birthdays.
- Sending tracts on baptism.
- Home Visitation, with gifts for special occasions.
- Maintaining a Cradle Roll Banner in the church, including the baptismal details and photos of children baptised in the previous three years.

A Cradle Roll Ministry can easily be augmented by other offerings such as “Parenthood and Your Marriage” classes or intergenerational “Together in Faith” classes designed to provide practical skills and ideas for the Christian nurture of young children. Church playgroups, commonly offered for parents with young children, can also be transformed into intentional ministries concerned with the parental fulfilment of their baptismal promises.

Resources

Cradle/Nursery Roll Kit, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004 (forthcoming).

Ruth **Gibson**, *In Search of Young Parents: Cradle Roll Parent’s Ministry*, Beacon Hill Press, 1984.

From Cradle to Graduation: Baptismal Catechesis as a Process over Time

The last decade has seen the development of exciting new models for baptismal ministry focusing on baptismal catechesis as a “process-over-time”. The Youth & Family Institute “Milestones Ministry” and the *Faith Inkubators* “Faith Stepping Stones” program are perhaps the best examples of these models. Each involves the bringing together of pastoral care, Christian education and liturgy into a comprehensive program designed to tend the baptismal journey of children in the context of family and congregation from the font into adolescence and beyond. On an annual basis, parents and children are together invited to participate in “short bursts” of intergenerational programming, leading into (i) the development of faith practices in the home; (ii) blessing and gifting before the altar in congregational worship. The occasion for these annual invitations are so-called “milestones” or “stepping stones” e.g. the anniversary of baptism, entry into Sunday School, commencement of Primary Schooling, gifting of the child’s first bible, First Communion, commencement of Confirmation Preparation, Confirmation, High School graduation. These programs are not intended to replace age-specific Christian education, but to engage parents and children (a) together ;(b) more deeply; (c) more consistently; and (d) over time in enacting the baptismal promises.²

A complementary resource is Mindy Bak’s *Together in Faith: Interactive Sessions for Children and Parents*. The strength of this resource is that it provides session outlines that directly address key catechetical topics such as praying with and for one another, the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, using Scripture, and the Apostles Creed. Once again, there is an emphasis upon supporting the baptismal ministry of parents within the home as well as engaging children and parents in the wider community of faith and its worship life. The table below lists key features of the “Faith Stepping Stones” and *Together in Faith* programs.

“FAITH STEPPING STONES” PROGRAM	“TOGETHER IN FAITH” PROGRAM
<p><u>Stepping Stone #1</u></p> <p>When: During the first year after the child’s baptism.</p> <p>Teaching: 3 sessions focus on the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of infants and their parents.</p> <p>Faith Practice: Parents are taught how to do a nightly blessing as a family faith practice.</p> <p>Worship: Following the three sessions, parents and children are blessed in worship in a rite of baptismal remembrance and recommitment to baptismal promises.</p>	<p><u>1-2 Year-Olds and Parents: Baptismal Birthday</u></p> <p>Event/s: An intergenerational event focused on celebrating and remembering our baptisms. Families are given ideas for “taking the celebration home”.</p> <p>Worship Participation: A rite of baptismal remembrance is held on Baptism of our Lord Sunday or as part of an Easter Vigil.</p>

² Inevitably though, they tend to have something of a transforming influence on other Christian education programming in the direction of a greater partnership with the home.

<p>Follow-Up: Participants are invited into a “new parents” small group fellowship with the people they’ve met during the course.</p>	
<p><u>Stepping Stone #2</u></p> <p>When: At the time of the child’s entry in the congregation’s Sunday School ministry.</p> <p>Teaching: 3 sessions for parents and toddlers. The physical, emotional and spiritual development of the toddler is explored, and parents are taught how to pray with their children.</p> <p>Faith Practice: Parents are taught to add prayer to the nightly blessing as a family faith practice.</p> <p>Worship: Parents and children are blessed in worship, with a focus on the child’s entry into Sunday School and on the family’s prayer life.</p> <p>Follow-Up: Participants are invited to continue meeting in a small group support system for parents of toddlers.</p>	<p><u>3 Year-Olds and Parents: Praying Together</u></p> <p>Event/s: 2 sessions focused on helping parents and children learn to pray together.</p> <p>Worship Participation: As part of a worship service, the children lead the congregation in prayer (memorised).</p>
<p><u>Stepping Stone #3</u></p> <p>When: At the time of the child’s commencement of Primary School education.</p> <p>Teaching: 3 parent-child sessions centred on the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of Reception-age children and their parents.</p> <p>Faith Practice: Parents are taught to share “highs and lows” with their children, and add it to the prayer and blessing as a nightly family faith practice.</p> <p>Worship: Following the three sessions, parents and children return to the altar and font to recommit to/affirm the baptismal promises and pledge to add “highs and lows” to their nightly family faith ritual.</p>	<p><u>4 Year-Olds and Parents: Forgiveness</u></p> <p>Event/s: 2 sessions during which parents and children learn to say “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you” to one another in Jesus’ name.</p> <p>Worship Participation: Parents and children confess their sins to each other as part of the Confession, and together receive the Absolution.</p>
<p><u>Stepping Stone #4</u></p> <p>When: Children are in 2nd or 3rd grade.</p> <p>Teaching: Up to 8 sessions centred round the gift of a first bible from parent to child. Intergenerational sessions provide an overview of Scripture and focus on its use in family life.</p> <p>Faith Practice: Parents and children commit to read a bible verse nightly as part of the family faith ritual.</p> <p>Worship: Stepping Stone #4 ends at the altar where parents are affirmed for keeping their baptismal promises to provide for the faith</p>	<p><u>Reception Children and Parents: The Lord’s Prayer</u></p> <p>Event/s: Two sessions where parents and children explore the Lord’s Prayer together.</p> <p>Worship Participation: The children lead the Lord’s Prayer during worship.</p>

<p>instruction of their children, and parents and children promise together to read and learn the Scriptures.</p>	
<p><u>Stepping Stone #5</u></p> <p>When: At the time of the child’s preparation for First Communion (5th – 6th grade).</p> <p>Teaching: 3 intergenerational sessions taking parents and children from Passover to Lord’s Supper. Confession and forgiveness are explored together.</p> <p>Faith Practice: “Mutual conversation and consolation” (confession and forgiveness in Christ’s name) is added to the nightly family faith ritual.</p> <p>Worship: Stepping Stone #5 concludes with children taking First Communion accompanied by their parents. As part of the service, parents and children pledge together to confess their sins to and forgive one another each night.</p>	<p><u>First Graders and Parents: The 10 Commandments</u></p> <p>Event/s: Two intergenerational sessions designed to explore the 10 commandments and help children and parents commit them to memory.</p> <p>Worship Participation: First graders recite the 10 Commandments during worship.</p>
<p><u>Stepping Stone #6</u></p> <p>When: At the time of the young person’s entry into the congregation’s confirmation ministry program (7th-9th grade).</p> <p>Teaching: 3 intergenerational sessions on “surviving adolescence” where youth and parents learn and commit to the art of theological reflection (setting the bible verse and “highs and lows” of the day together to ask “what is God saying to us today?”).</p> <p>Faith Practice: Parents and youth add “faith dialogue” to their nightly family faith ritual.</p> <p>Worship: Parents and children are blessed in a public worship rite focussed on the commencement of confirmation preparation.</p>	<p><u>Third Graders and Parents: Opening the Bible</u></p> <p>Event/s: Children and parents attend three sessions in which they learn helpful facts about the bible and discover how to read it together.</p> <p>Worship Participation: Third graders read Scripture together as a class during worship.</p>
<p><u>Stepping Stone #7</u></p> <p>When: At the time of the young person’s confirmation.</p> <p>Teaching: 3 sessions where youth and parents look together at their faith confession, their confirmation and their call.</p> <p>Worship: Parents and youth are involved together in the rite of confirmation.</p>	<p><u>Fourth Graders and Parents: The Apostles Creed</u></p> <p>Event/s: Parents and children together learn why Christian use a Creed for confessing their faith and what the Apostles Creed means, as well as how to confess our faith to others each day.</p> <p>Worship Participation: Fourth graders lead the congregation in the Apostle’s Creed.</p>
<p><u>Stepping Stone #8</u></p>	<p><u>Fifth Graders and Parents: Real Life Faith</u></p>

<p>When: At the time of the young person's completion of high school education.</p> <p>Teaching: 3 sessions where youth and parents look back on God's blessings, reflect on the present and look to the future of their new callings.</p> <p>Worship: This final stepping stone brings parents and youth to the altar to repeat the baptismal and confirmation promises once again. Parents are invited to bless their youth and the youth their parents.</p>	<p>Event/s: Parents and children learn more about Martin Luther and discover how to connect bible verses, prayer and worship to everyday life.</p> <p>Worship Participation: Fifth graders lead Luther's Morning Prayer in worship.</p>
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Resources

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Appendix

Source: <http://www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org/resources/milestonetraining.html>

Steps for Training a Milestones Visitation Team

Introduction

A Milestones Visitation Team is one of the eight strategies of the Child In Our Hands conceptual model. The baptism milestone may be the first visit a congregation would focus upon. Some congregations may call the visitation teams Baptismal Visitation Team. The entire Child In Our Hands conceptual model is a way of tending the baptismal journey from pre-birth to the grave.

It is most important for the staff and lay leaders of the congregation to have a clear picture of the Child In Our Hands conceptual model for youth and family ministry. It is a partnership of the home and congregation in nurturing faith and passing on the faith. The home is the primary place to teach and nurture faith and the role of the congregation is to strengthen the home and equip the home to pass on the faith. A very helpful booklet to share this vision with the leadership team of the congregation is [Four Imperatives: Youth and Family Ministry](#) by Dick Hardel and Mert Strommen. The four imperatives are: **Strengthening Family Relationships, Faith-Focused Christian Education, Congregation As Family, and Christian Youth Subculture.**

We, at the Youth & Family Institute, often talk about Five Themes for Youth and Family Ministry and Four Keys for Nurturing Faith in the Home.

Five Themes for Youth and Family Ministry

1. Faith is formed by the Holy Spirit through personal, trusted relationships—often, but not always in our own homes.
2. The Church is a living partnership between the ministry of the congregation and the ministry of the home.
3. Where Christ is present in faith, the home is Church, too.
4. Faith is caught more than it is taught.
5. If we want spiritual children and youth, we need spiritual adults/parents.

Four Keys for Nurturing Faith in the Home

1. Caring Conversation
2. Family Devotions
3. Family Rituals and Traditions
4. Family Service

The Child In Our Hands conceptual model is a very helpful way to support families as they tend the baptismal journey from pre-birth to the grave. The congregation connects more family milestones with God; equips parents, relatives, and other care-giving adults to nurture faith; and provides resources for the home.

The giving of a [FaithChest](#) at baptism (or confirmation, high school graduation, wedding, or in the last years of one's life) is a tool to connect the home and congregation. Since faith is formed by the Holy Spirit through personal, trusted relationships, a most important aspect of Milestones Ministry is to develop a personal, trusted relationship with a person or a family. That is the purpose of developing Milestones Visitation Teams.

Dick Hardel suggests that a Milestones Visitation Team be made up of two people—one over 65 years of age and a second, a 20 something or a 30 something. People over 65 years of age are the most church-ed generation in the USA. The combination of the two generations on a Milestones Visitation Team makes for a

combination of faith, wisdom, vision, energy, and ministry. The Holy Spirit will cause a wonderful growth in the relationship of the members of each visitation team.

It is important for the congregation to support the parents so that they can better live out the promises made in baptism. A congregation cannot leave a family alone to nurture faith. In baptism the entire faith community commits to helping nurture faith throughout the life of the baptized person. The Milestones Visitation Team is just one way that a congregation becomes very intentional and active in supporting families to grow in Christ.

Recruitment and Commitment

If we value the Milestones Visitation Ministry, then we should always recruit people to be trained. Recruit people from at least three different generations who love the Lord, love people, and love to help people grow in Christ. A Milestones Visitation Team will commit to praying regularly for the family, visit the family in the home at four different milestones in the family's life, and stay in contact with the family. Each time the Milestones Visitation Team visits the family in the home, they bring gift for the family to help them nurture faith in the child or youth's life. They also bring an invitation to a corporate worship service designed around the milestone and another invitation to an intergenerational training event designed to teach the extended family a variety of ways to nurture faith at that milestone in the child's life.

Suggested Steps in Training

1. Each visitation team volunteer understand the congregation's commitment to support and tend the baptismal journey of a baptized child, youth, or adult.
2. Instruct the volunteers on the theology of baptism, the meaning of the liturgy in worship, the traditions of the congregation, and the living out of the promises of baptism.
3. Teach the volunteers how to pray aloud for the baptized person and family. Impress upon them the necessity for regular and frequent prayer.
4. Teach the volunteer how to share their faith through telling their faith stories. We highly recommend using [FaithTalk](#), [FaithTalk with Children](#), or [Scripture Talk](#).
5. Equip the volunteers with listening skills, care-giving skills, and relationship building conversation skills.
6. Instruct the volunteers on the meaning and the use of the gift that will be given by the congregation to the family. The Institute recommends [Building Blocks of Faith](#) or [Parenting With A Purpose](#). The volunteers should be very familiar with this resource. The giving of the resource can be the entry into talking about tending the baptismal journey.
7. Teach the volunteers how to invite a family to the baptismal counseling with the pastor or lay minister. The following might serve as an outline for a first visit to a family. A phone conversation with the pastor or lay leader has already confirmed this first visit. So the family expects the team.
 - Introduction of team members and learning the names of the members of the family. Share the joy of making such a visit.
 - Learning a little about the background and history of the family.
 - Present the gift and give a brief explanation of how the parents should use the gift. Inform the parents what it means to be a Milestones Visitation Team and how this congregation is a Child in Our Hands congregation called by God to help families tend the baptismal journey of their children.
 - Discuss and arrange for the date and time of the baptismal counseling. The visitation team should volunteer to pick up the family and drive them to the pastor's office for the counseling. The visitation team should remain with them during the counseling and stand with the extending family during the baptism. The Milestones Visitation Team will take all the photographs and/or video during the baptism so that all members of the family can fully participate in the baptism milestone. Following the actual baptismal rite is an excellent time for the pastor or lay leader to present the family with a FaithChest. The meaning and purpose of the gift of the FaithChest by the congregation should be shared. The Milestones Visitation Team should know about the congregation's history with making and presenting the FaithChest.

8. Instruct the volunteers on follow up by using email, postal services, and telephone. They should also become aware of other key milestones and choose which milestones they will use for the next home visit.
9. It would be very helpful if the Milestones Visitation Team members experienced a corporate worship service designed around a specific milestone and an intergenerational event of the congregation before making their first visit. This should not be a requirement, but it would be very helpful. The Youth & Family Institute has produced two manuals to assist the congregation: [Milestones Worship Celebrations](#) and [Milestones Intergenerational Enrichment Events](#).
10. The congregation should have a prayer support team for each Milestones Visitation Team. The Visitation Team should be introduced to their prayer support team and instructed on how best to stay in communication. The congregations should use either staff personnel or trained lay volunteers who oversee and support the ministry of the Milestone Visitation Teams.

Conclusion

These are only suggestions to get you started with Milestones Visitation Team training. You should always discuss this with the pastor, staff, and/or other key lay leaders of the congregation so that everyone is clear on the purpose and direction of the ministry and the training. They will have valuable additions, adoptions, and suggestions as you develop the training model. A training setting that works very well is that of an overnight retreat. Otherwise you might use 4 two-hour classes. It is very difficult for volunteers to commit more time to training. There are a variety of settings and styles of the training that would work well. It is important that you consider what will work best for the volunteers and staff of your congregation. The greatest learning will happen by experiencing the visits.

May God continue to bless you and the ministry of the congregation as you intentionally tend the baptismal journey of children, youth, and adults.