

Twelve Practical Ways to Create a Family-Friendly Church



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It is important for congregations to provide age-specific classes and activities. Children can learn at their pace and on their level. Teens can "hang out" with others who share Christian values and beliefs. Adults can build community with other adults.

But, it is also important for congregations to care for the entire family as one organism. Many of our church activities actually pull family members apart from each other. Here are practical ways to strengthen the whole family unit.

1. Do a survey. Ask people with children/teens, "How family-friendly do you find our church? On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate us? Why did you give our church this rating? Do you have helpful suggestions?"
2. Welcome parents into children/youth programs. Parents are often curious and interested in learning about your congregational activities for their child. When parents are involved, they can make faith links between church and home.
3. Welcome children into adult programs. With some adaptation, a quiet play area and snack table can be added to an adult meeting or program. Worried about noise level? You may have noticed that adult's tolerance for noise increases after having children. It can work the same way in a family-friendly church.
4. Turn traditional programs into intergenerational programs—an intergenerational Bible class or Sunday school, an all-generation Vacation Bible School, an all-person annual meeting.
5. Bring a book sale to your congregation once a year. Arrange a consignment of family devotional books, family fun night suggestions, Christian family videos, Christian computer games and activities.
6. Give families opportunity to serve together—visit a nursing home as a family, work at a Habitat for Humanity site, pack food at the Food Bank.
7. Choose Sunday school curriculum that is family-friendly, that has take-home papers, activities or suggestions so families can reinforce lessons.
8. Invite someone with a desk-top publishing program on their computer to design a faith-building activity booklet for families. Include ideas like these: daily prayers, simple Christian rituals, Bible verses to memorize, suggestions for family discussion about how to apply Bible truths to their lives.
9. Create a quiet room, a prayer room or a spirituality centre at your church where entire families can go and pray together.
10. Organize family outings such as canoe trips, picnics, tobogganing.
11. Invite...invite...invite children and youth to stay in worship. One minister says this at every worship service, "In our congregation we provide Sunday school for babies to age 12, but children are also welcome in our congregational worship. You, as a family, may choose where to be."

12. Give families instructions for a simple Christian ritual which can be used at every meal. Here is the one we use in our family at meal time:

Leader lights a white Christ candle.

Leader: We light this candle to remind us that Jesus is like a light to the world. The Lord be with you.

Others: And also with you.

We join hands and say a prayer of thankfulness for food.

At the end of the meal, we use a candle snuffer to extinguish the candle.

Leader: The smoke from this candle reminds us of the Spirit of God going out all over (our town) and the world.

Planning a Retreat?

A River in the Desert (Abingdon Press, 2001) is a book of 12 retreats for women's groups. They can easily be used for other groups as well—elders, youth, intergenerational groupings. Some are one-day retreats. Others are for the weekend. Some of the themes include: Sacred listening; Windows of prayer; Power for living; Joyful heart—Dancing Spirit; Discovering my spiritual gifts. Available from the Book Room, 800-619-7301; bookroom@presbyterian.ca.