

“There is no magic bullet, no perfect formula, no ‘just right.’ What we *can* do is listen for the Holy Spirit and do the hard work of following where she leads.”

## Young Families at Church

In my work as a family minister at a program size church, the question of how to engage parents and children was a constant topic of conversation. Recently, people have been asking me about young families at church, so I have offered the tips below. All of these suggestions can work with small churches, medium-size churches, and large churches.

### 1. Start Small

Look over the ideas below (and brainstorm your own), then choose just 1-2 things to tackle the first year. For example: baby welcoming ministry, parent Bible study, six week class on parenting as a spiritual practice, sending a note to children on their baptismal anniversary, intentionally thanking parents for bringing their children to worship, or a monthly family newsletter with ideas for faith at home

### 2. Build Relationships

All church ministries are built of relationships. If you want more young families to be engaged in your church, start building relationship with those already present. For example: include specific families in your prayer practice, take parents out for coffee, send encouraging notes, have lunch with a family after church, remember people's names and what's happening in their lives, or attend children's sporting events and sit with parents

### 3. Don't Do it Alone

It's fine for a staff person to engage in a ministry on their own for a few months to test the waters, but if you want young families to be actively engaged in a parish for the long run, the ministry needs to have structure.

For example: recruit some volunteers to help you care for and build relationships with young families, build family ministry into a staff job description, create a Christian formation committee, work with existing ministries/committees to increase involvement of young families in many areas of parish life

### 4. Consider Your Context

Each parish is unique, and this really matters when it comes to young families. When looking at possible ministry ideas, take some time to hold up each idea against the context of your specific situation. For example: How far away do most of our young families live from the church? How long would it take most families to get to church on Sunday vs. a weekday afternoon?

Then consider questions such as: Who in our congregation is already ministering with young families? Who else might be interested in this ministry? What is our goal for ministry with young families? What is our vision for families ministries in one year, five years, ten years? What does our congregation already do well in welcoming/engaging young families? What aspects of our current community life might deter young families from engaging more deeply?

### **5. Work Hard**

Like most ministry worth doing, engaging with young families takes time, persistence, and hard work. There is no magic bullet, no perfect formula, no 'just right.' What we **can** do is listen for the Holy Spirit and do the hard work of following where she leads.

## **Building Faith Articles on Young Families**

These are just a few articles which focus on church ideas for young families. Use the Building Faith search bar to find more!

- [New Baby Ministry: Churches Supporting Parents](#)
- [Lectio Divina with Children](#)
- [The Children's Bulletin: Which One is Right for Your Church?](#)
- [A Bible Study for Mothers - and Babies!](#)

## **In Depth Reading about Young Families: Lifelong Faith Journal**

This journal, published by Lifelong Faith is a trusted resource for articles on formation, written by authors from many Christian denominations. A compilation issue was recently published, focused on family faith formation. Read and download here: [Lifelong Faith Journal: Family Faith Formation](#).

### **Contents**

Best Practices in Family Faith Formation - John Roberto (Fall 2007)

The Importance of Family Faith for Lifelong Faith Formation - John Roberto (Spring 2012)

The Rule of Family Faith - Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Summer 2007)

The Joy of Practice in Families (Summer 2008)

Faith Formation with Families in Today's Church - Leif Kehrwald (Summer 2007)

Faith Formation with Hispanic/Latino Families - Ida Miranda (Summer 2007)

Transforming Faith Formation One Family at a Time - Jim Merhaut (Summer 2007)

Family Daily Living Faith Practices - Christy Olson (Fall 2010)

Passing on Faith—Milestone to Milestone - Linda Staats (Spring 2008)

## Books about Ministry with Young Families

- [Church + Home: The Proven Formula for Building Lifelong Faith](#) by Mark Holmen
- [Families & Faith: A Vision & Practice for Parish Leaders](#) by Leif Kehrwald (Editor)
- [Inside Out Families: Living the Faith Together](#) by Diana R. Garland
- [Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families: Living the Faith in Daily Life](#) by Diana Garland

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