

Great Ideas that Work

1. Intergenerational Events

In reading John Westerhoff's book, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* we realized that our Sunday school had become so entrenched in the model of regular education, that we weren't providing enough time for our older generation to witness directly to our children. When we are all in our separate age-level Sunday school rooms, it's hard to interact. We also noticed that on holiday weekends our Sunday school attendance was much lower than normal because many families were either traveling away or had out-of-town visitor coming in. So, we decided to designate these Sundays of lower attendance as opportunities for us to practice intergenerational learning – instead of having just a few in all the age level rooms, we had one large area where everyone would gather. On Memorial Day weekend one year, we highlighted a “Share your Faith” morning and had scheduled activities designed to engage folks in conversation about their faith. They had an opportunity to talk, write, draw, and create a clay figure symbolizing something specific about their faith. Seniors left amazed at the faith already in place among the children of the group. Intergenerational bonds of lasting friendship were forged that day. On July 4th one year, senior adults were able to share what it was like to be alive during the civil rights movement.

2. Shining Through

Shining Through is a 30 minute video series with accompanying pamphlet appropriate for adult small groups. This series emphasizes how each of us can be a vehicle through which God's light can reach from one generation to the next and through to a hurting world. Finding and spending valuable family time daily in conversation and activities influence children's spiritual growth. In this video, after a brief introduction, individuals:

- pose questions (*Yes, but...*),
- offer reflections (*Looking back...*),
- and share experiences (*New or revisited ideas...*) regarding faith formation.

The five areas examined include:

- Finding time for faith-based activities and conversations within the family
- Communicating and modeling your faith to your children
- Becoming a part of the body of Christ
- Learning how to be “in the world, but not of it”
- Being accountable through family goals and covenants

At Wimberley UMC, we used this series for a five-week study in our Sunday school class of parents with small children. Additionally, we condensed the discussion and also taught it in a one-time parent workshop during Vacation Bible School. That way we could reach out to people in the community who had brought their children to VBS, in addition to reaching our regular members.

This series was created through a grant from Methodist Healthcare Ministries and has a copy has been distributed to each congregation in the Southwest Texas Conference. For more information on how to access this resource, contact Nancy McDougall at mmcdougall@netzero.com or 325-388-3752.

Why is teaching our faith at home to our children so important?

- Research shows family life to be the most important factor in “the formation, interpretation, and support of children’s faith in God.” (C. Ellis Nelson, noted Christian educator)
- The family is absolutely essential to Christian formation. Today when our families seem to be struggling under the effect of many toxic cultural influences, congregations need to be working along with other community agencies to provide support in teaching basic parenting skills, in providing services in times of crisis, and in providing “hands on” learning experiences that also support faith sharing in the home. (Marjorie Thompson, author of *Family: the Forming Center*)
- Research from a comprehensive study completed by the Search Institute of Minneapolis in the early 90’s indicated three main influences on the determination of a “mature faith.” Participation in corporate worship and Christian education activities, although important, were less instrumental than the influence of the family on developing faith. Participating in regular family devotions, discussing matters of faith at home, and

participating as a family in mission or service projects increased the probability of having children who grew to a mature Christian faith as an adult. (Mary Jane Pierce Norton, General Board of Discipleship, UMC)