

# Milestones Ministry

## Connecting Faith and Everyday Life



Learning Ministries Day  
NE PA Synod  
April 18, 2015



# Christian Education Network of the ELCA

*"... that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love ..."*  
Colossians 2:2



St. Paul's  
Cumberland, MD



My faith journey  
began here



St. John's  
Lutheran  
Church  
WORSHIP: 9A.M.  
REV. ALFRED RUGGIERO  
PASTOR



Reflecting on  
where my faith  
intersected with  
everyday living...





+



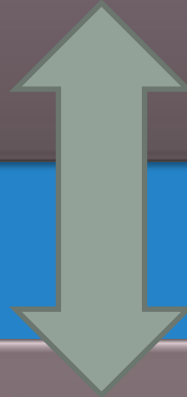
Debbie's  
=  
Language  
Analogy

# Faith as a Second Language



The analogy:

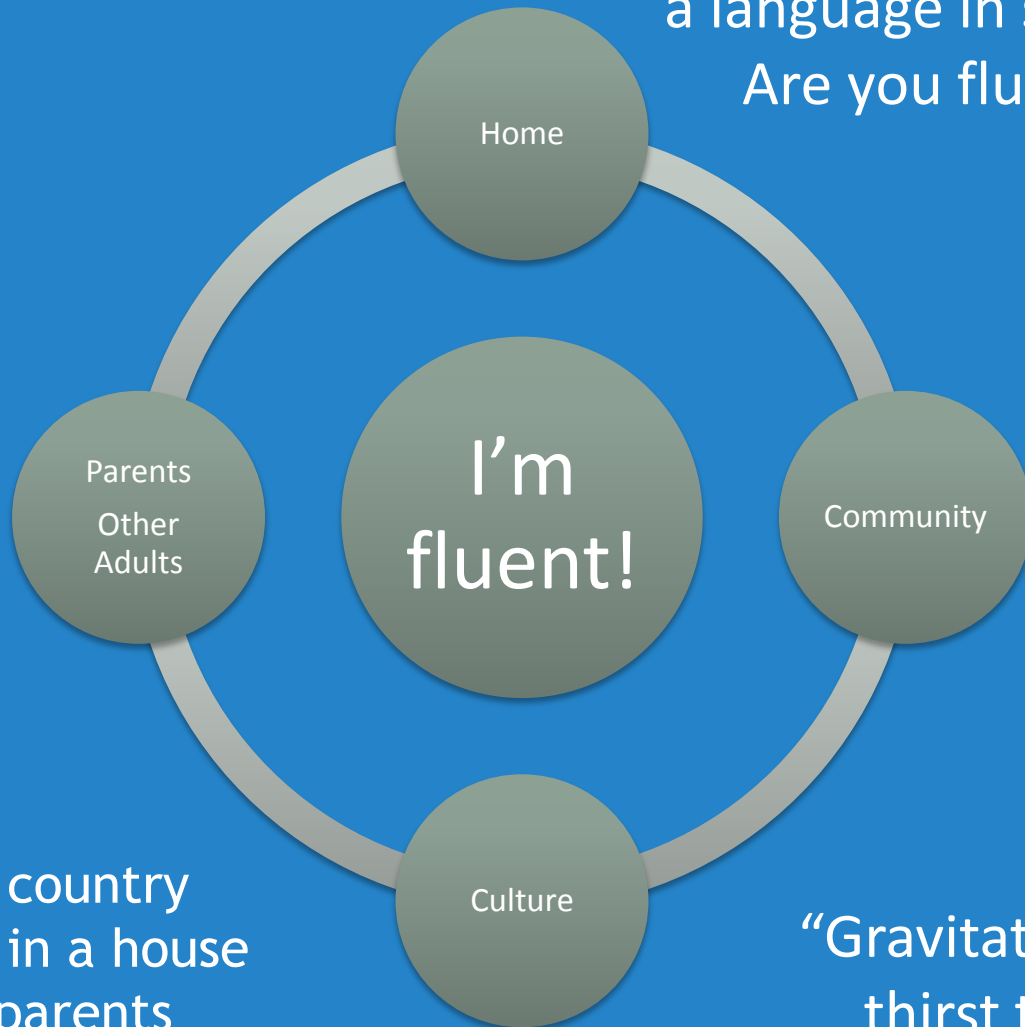
English as a Second  
Language



Faith as a Second  
Language

# Are you fluent in another language?

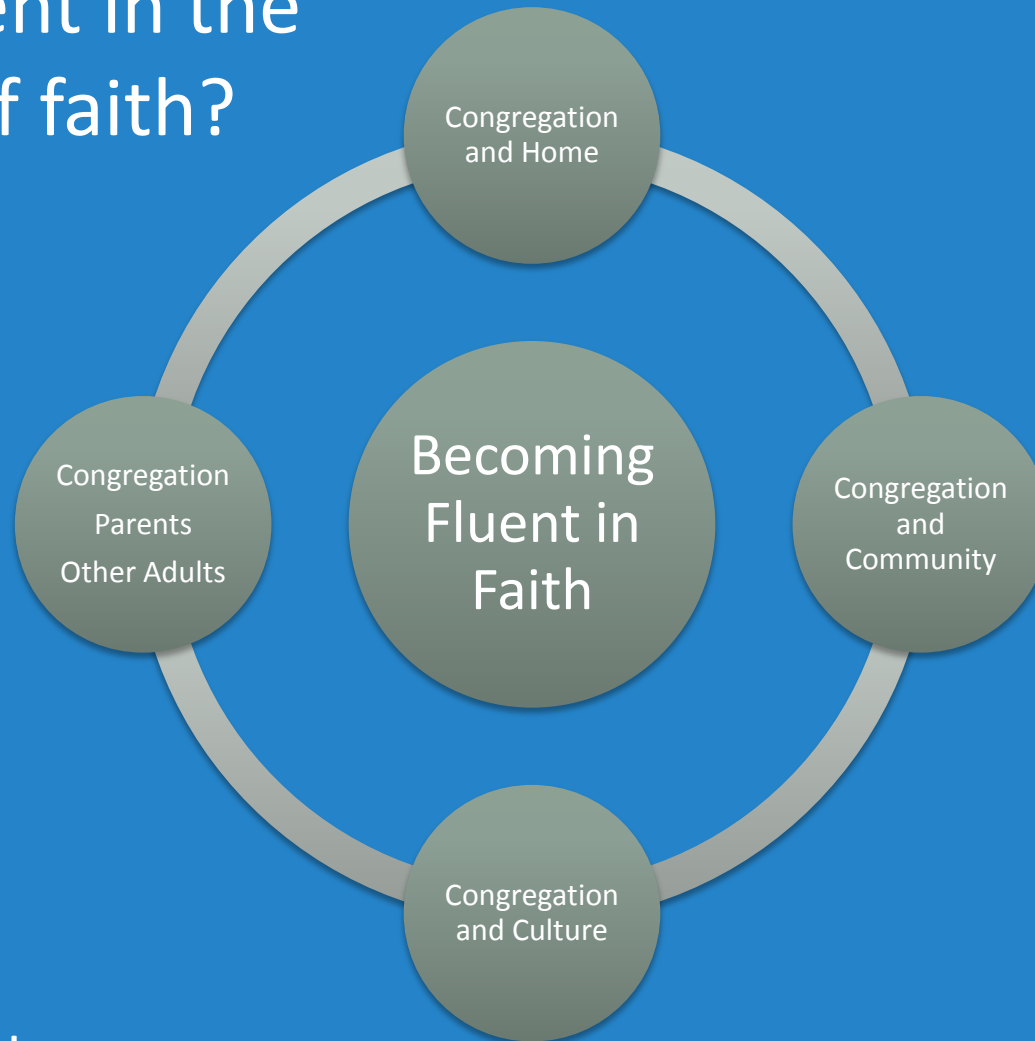
How many hours a week did you study  
a language in school?  
Are you fluent?



1. Lived in the country
2. Were raised in a house where your parents spoke it to you

“Gravitate towards and thirst to be with..”

# Are we fluent in the language of faith?



“Gravitate  
towards and  
thirst to be  
with..”

How many hours a week do we speak faith?  
Result? Thirst to be in community.

# 1. Learning a Language:

When will my child become fluent?

- To become fluent, one must be immersed through being surrounded by the language in the home or by living in the country where the language is spoken.
- Fluency involves becoming familiar with and practicing specific rituals and traditions.
- Culture includes language, food, customs, and traditions
- Age 13: What would happen if we placed a focus on equipping children and their families before they turn 13 ?
- What impact does facing the reality of learning a language have on those over 13 through adults in our congregations?

# 1. Providing Tools:



Atama...Kata...

- Learning a language involves action and hands-on involvement . The result? It sticks!
- Providing opportunities to build relationships.
- Providing consistent words to describe core rituals and traditions and name them is key.
- Repeating more than once and embedding faith practices in the ministry of the congregation leads to fluency.
- Fluency results in being a way of life. It defines the DNA of a congregation.

### 3. Immersion:

- Surrounding children and youth with a common language and adults who speak the language is immersion.
- Immersion leads to learning about the culture of a community. Every faith community has a culture.
- If you gave a survey and asked people in your congregation to identify Christian traditions or Lutheran traditions, could they do it readily?
- We make assumptions that we are already immersing people. We assume they speak our language.

## 4. Fluency:

- It doesn't happen in 1 hour week. In fact it doesn't happen in 5 hours or 10 hours a week!
- It leads to thirsting to gather with those who speak the language.
- Could you name more than 5 people in your congregation you consider to be fluent?

## 5. Application:

- The message/sermon normally includes life application.
- It connects us to God's Word.

We seldom follow up with conversations relating scripture to our own lives.

How and where does one have opportunities to apply what they learn and realize it is a way of life?

## 6. Challenges:

- The opportunity to evangelize lies in our faith fluency and is dependent on how we describe ourselves.
- Although we have programs to help others, how often do we verbalize our actions through Christian language?
- How do we move from faith community to the world?

## Off the Base! (comfort zone)

- The opportunity for outreach lies in our fluency in the language of faith and is dependent on how we describe ourselves.
- Although we have programs to help others, how often do we verbalize our actions through Christian language?
- How often do we add faith to everyday conversation and everyday life celebrations?
- How do we move from faith community to the world?  
We get “off the base”

*“Cultures are what make countries unique.”*

**Culture** is a word for people's 'way of life', meaning the way groups do things. Different groups of people may have different cultures.

A culture is passed on to the next generation by learning, whereas genetics are passed on by heredity.

Culture is seen in people's writing, religion, music, clothes, cooking, and in what they do.

*“Cultures are what make congregations unique.”*



If I were to ask you to define the culture of your congregation, how would you describe it?



## Defining a basic culture:



1. **Caring Relationships** – Where do caring relationships happen in the faith community? Around tables for fellowship? In homes?



2. **Rituals** – What rituals or rites of passage do families in the congregation list they do at home? How do these rituals interface with their faith?





**3. Traditions** – What types of traditions passed down through generations are celebrated in homes of the congregation? How do they tie these traditions to their family history? How do they tie them to their faith?

**4. Values** – The core of a culture is formed by values. What do you value most in the congregation? What do you think others value most? What do you value most in your home?



**If we would like to view the faith community through a cultural lens, we need to be honest with one another and open to truthful, caring relationships.**

**Immersion = Fluency**

**Our goal? Fluency in the faith.  
It's a way of life!**

Let's take a look at 5 basic principles for living and passing on faith...

## **Milestones Ministry Five Principles for living and passing on faith**

- Faith is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit through personal, trusted relationships – often in our own homes.
- The church is a living partnership between the ministry of the congregation and ministry of the home.

# Milestones Ministry Five Principles for living and passing on faith

- Where Christ is present in faith, the home is church too.
- Faith is caught more than it is taught.
- If we want Christian children and youth, we need Christian adults.

Key  
Word...ADULTS

## What is a milestone?

A milestone is a meaningful, memorable moment in the lives of individuals and communities.

Milestones in our lives can be life changing. Some are happy. Some can be sad and fearful times.

# What milestones do you currently celebrate in your congregation?

Baptism?

Mission  
Trips?

Communion?

Bible?

Others?

Welcome to  
Worship?

Blessing of  
Backpacks?

FaithChest®?

**What milestones do you recognize and celebrate in your home and daily life?**

**Birthdays?**

**Baptismal Birthdays?**

**Aniversaries?**

**Graduation?**

**Others?**

**First Day of School?**

**Driver's License?**

**Retirement?**

The milestones we celebrate in the congregation.  
Most are for children and youth.

Connecting these to  
faith talk is a given.  
They happen in the  
congregation.

Baptism

1st

Ann

of Baptism

ion

tion

Entering  
Sunday School

Some milestones we celebrate in the congregation.  
Most are for children and youth.

What happens when  
we recognize a  
milestone in everyday  
life and add  
conversation , prayer  
and blessing to it?

Bap

1st

Bl

B

nion

ation

**What are some meaningful, life changing events in your own lives or the lives of friends that can be recognized?**

Where do we start?

**Name it!**

## 1. Name it

Identify a moment as significant to one's life and faith directly related to the name of the Milestone Ministry event.

## 2. Equip it

Provide support, modeling, and resources to help people experience a milestone in life as an opportunity to again embrace the grace of God in Christ

### 3. Bless it

Offer a prayer in a worship service, cross+generational event, and/or the small group or home event to embrace people's lives with the grace, mercy, and peace of God in Christ.

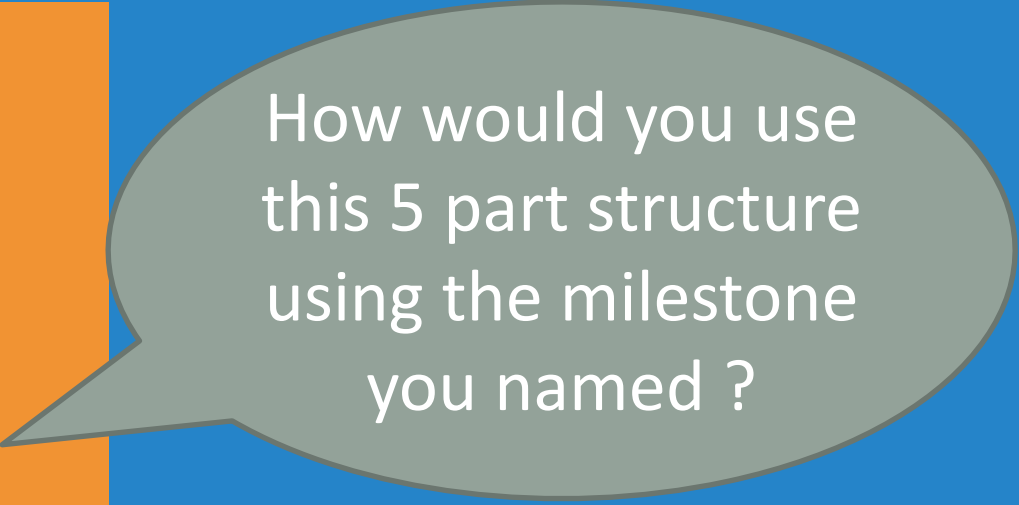
### 4. Gift it

Provide a gift to help the participants recall a particular milestone in their lives with faith, hope, and love

## 5. Reinforce it

Offer a follow up event to help deepen the faith formation impact of the Milestone Ministry experience. Encourage and support faith practices recommended at the initial Milestone event and, when helpful, explore new ones.

1. Name it
2. Equip it
3. Bless it
4. Gift it
5. Reinforce it



How would you use this 5 part structure using the milestone you named ?

# There are 18 Child-Youth Milestone Modules:



## + Kids and Money Milestone: Good Stewards of God's Gifts

### Desired Outcomes

- Teach children and families the biblical foundations of being a steward.
- Remind children and families of the source and giver of all our possessions.
- Help children and families use their resources wisely.

## + Bible Milestone: Placing Scripture in Hands

### Desired Outcomes

- Place Bibles into the hands and homes of children.
- Teach children and the adults in their lives how to use the Bible as a tool to nurture the Christian life and faith.
- Encourage children, parents/guardians and other caring adults to read and study the Bible regularly.
- Have a worship service that celebrates the giving of Bibles to children and the living of one's baptismal covenant by children and adults of all ages.
- Foster cross-generational faith formation in the home and the congregation.

We have named  
some for you!

# There are 18 Milestones Modules:



FaithChest® Milestone: Passing on Faith

Baptism Milestone: The Beginning Point of Nurturing a Faith Life

Anniversary of Baptism Milestone: Remembering Our Way of Life

Prayer Milestone: Relationships with God and Family



Welcoming Young Children to Worship Milestone: An Intentional Invitation

Entering Sunday School Milestone: First Steps for a Young Child

Kids and Money Milestone: Good Stewards of God's Gifts

Blessing of the Backpacks Milestone: A Fall Milestone for All Ages

Communion Milestone: Learning More about the Lord's Supper



# 18 Milestones Modules continued:



Bible Milestone: Placing Scripture in Hands and Homes



Bible Camp Milestone: Feeling God's Comfort in Outdoor Ministry

My Body, God's Gift Milestone: Sexuality as God's Good Gift

Middle School Milestone: Created in God's Image



Beginning Confirmation Milestone:

Walking with Youth on Their Faith Journeys

Confirmation Milestone: An Evening of Honor

Driver's License Milestone: Driver's License as a Rite of Passage

Mission Trip Milestone: Community Blessings at Home and Away

High School Graduation Milestone: Equipping Graduates for the Journey



# There are 8 Adult Milestone Modules:



# Adult Milestones

- For Caregivers of Aging Parents
- Return from Military Deployment
- Retirement
- New Home
- New Job
- First Time Grandparents
- Wedding Anniversary
- Empty Nest
- Four More in the Fall



# 8 Adult Milestones Modules:

Caring for Aging Parents: affirming primary care givers

Return from Military Deployment: reuniting with family and friends

New Home: Affirming the physical, spiritual, and emotional transition  
to a new living space



Retirement: a major life transition

Empty Nest

Wedding Anniversary

New Job

First Time Grandparents



# 4 Adult Milestones Modules (in the Fall)

First Time Parents  
Joining a Faith Community



Loss of a Loved One  
Connecting with Spiritual Gifts

# Introducing the design...

Desired  
Outcomes



*Bless*  
THIS HOME



*and all who enter*



*"By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches."*

*Proverbs 24:3 (NRSV)*

## + New Home Milestone: Affirming the Physical, Spiritual and Emotional Transition to a New Living Space

### Desired Outcomes

- Talk about changes and challenges of new living situations
- Share memories of previous homes as well as hopes and dreams for the future in a new home
- Understand how faith and worship can be practiced in the home
- Equip those in transition with a rituals and traditions for moving into a new home
- Provide resources for rituals/traditions which can be consistently practiced in the new home
- Connect ministry of the congregation with people in the community moving into new homes



# Introduction



## Milestones Ministry





Milestones Ministry brings an awareness of the presence of God to individuals of all generations through a vital partnership between home and congregation. Milestones Ministry provides a clear and usable model for congregations, homes, and community to connect faith formation resources with daily life experiences. The rich variety of Milestones Ministry does the essential ministry of the church: promoting Christian faith formation and outreach into the larger community. The outreach element is accentuated when the celebration of milestones is offered for the entire community and not just congregational members.

Milestones Ministry provides a clear and usable model. Individuals and larger households can participate in a way of life that marks special moments and honors them as important to the journey of faith. This model provides the means to implement Vibrant Faith Ministries' vision for passing on faith—a vision that places children of all ages in the center of the church's concern and sees God's redeeming work at play through home, congregation, community, culture, and creation.

Milestones incorporate a simple structure that includes naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing so that the Milestones Ministry event has a greater chance to take deeper root in lifelong faith formation.

At the heart of equipping people for their lifelong faith formation are the Four Keys. These faith practices are central to every milestone and integrated into people's daily lives as well as the life of the local congregation.

### The Four Keys:

-  Caring Conversations
-  Devotions
-  Service
-  Rituals and Traditions

These four daily faith practices are simple, doable, and practical. The Four Keys are used to open the imagination of individuals, families, small groups, and congregations with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They provide ways to nurture the Christian faith and reach out to others with the love of God in Christ. They serve as a catalyst for people to wonder about and play with a variety of ways to celebrate and practice the Christian faith in their daily lives.

To maximize its effectiveness, Milestones Ministry includes role modeling of the Four Keys in the congregational setting and incorporates opportunities for a follow-up gathering about a month later. The benefits of Milestones Ministry are more deeply rooted in the lives of people when they are able to gather again for a faith formation check-up. Therefore, each Milestones Ministry event offers a follow-up gathering that includes a Four Keys outline.

What is Milestones Ministry?

*Milestones Ministry provides a faith milestone as a marker along life's journey that says, "This is something important and God is here, too." It is a faith formation practice for both home and congregation that helps all generations recognize God's presence in everyday life.*



## Backpack Milestone

Many congregations have found the blessing of backpacks to be a very meaningful way to mark the passage of summer. It is a helpful transition for children, youth, and adults to the new fall schedule. It is also an opportunity to discover God's presence with us at home, school and work, and to be reminded that Jesus is always with us.

Going to school for the first time or returning to school for another year carries with it the challenges, anxieties, hopes, and opportunities that fill the lives of children, parents, and other caregivers with many diverse emotions and wonderments. There is a prime time to acknowledge our fears and God's goodness and love. It can be a time to remember the words of Jesus, "have no fear," and provide a way to begin the year and each school day with the Four Keys that nurture the Christian faith: caring conversations, devotions, service, and rituals and traditions.

We bring children, parents, and other adults together to recognize this time of the year by providing the opportunity to bless backpacks by incorporating a simple structure that includes:

**Naming** – It is important to recognize this time of year as the end of summer and the beginning of new, and sometimes hectic, schedules for families.

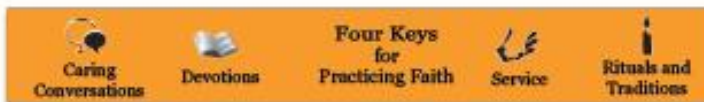
**Equipping** – All ages are given the opportunity to practice the Four Keys and have time to take a deep breath, exhale slowly, and claim values and faith that establish and direct our lives beyond the fears, anxieties, and pressures of life.

**Blessing** – The blessing of the backpacks allows us not just to imagine, but also to experience the larger picture of life—the one that says life is not dominated or formed by pressures and uncertainties.

**Gifting** – You may give a gift as a physical reminder of this occasion, such as a zipper pull or key chain. (See Appendix 1.)

**Reinforcing** – It is a good idea to follow up after the Backpack Milestone by connecting this group one more time to share stories about how their school year is going. The Backpack Milestone Follow Up is on page 7.

5 Part Structure



1. Name it
2. Equip it
3. Bless it
4. Gift it
5. Reinforce it

## Notes for Leadership



### For the Leader

Identify a team to help plan this milestone. As the leadership team plans for the Blessing of the Backpack Milestone, notice the Optional Milestone focus (see Appendix 2). It encourages extending this milestone to give attention to the nonstudent population in congregations and communities.

Although the original and central thrust of the Blessing of the Backpack Milestone is to reach out to children and youth who are going back to school, it really serves a larger purpose and population. People of all ages are going back to school as student or staff. Some will be pursuing a GED or college degree or some kind of technical training for the workplace.

The fall has the cultural feel of new schedules for most people in society. Even if someone in one's own household is not beginning a year at school, he or she will most likely know of children, youth, or adults who are. Fall schedules will quite likely affect all ages. Summer vacations have come to an end, and many people feel the urgency of another cycle of hectic schedules.



### Planning for this Milestone

- Check the school calendar to determine which Sunday precedes most of the school openings. Arrange with worship planners to have a blessing at worship service(s) on that weekend.
- Decide which gift will be a reminder of the occasion, such as a key chain, zipper pull, or one of the gifts listed in Appendix 1. Allow enough time to order gifts.
- Publicize by making an outdoor banner to invite the community. Sample wording: Begin This School Year with a Blessing of the Backpacks at [Date and Time]! Remember, signs alone do not get new people to come. There is no substitute for personal invitations.
- Since not all children can afford a backpack, you might encourage individuals in your congregation to make a special offering of backpacks (or money to purchase them) so that all children will have one.
- Compose a notice for the church bulletin. (See Appendix 2.)
- Think through ways faith talk can continue at home after the Blessing of the Backpack Milestone takes place. Examples: 1. Taking Faith Home bulletins sent via email or provided weekly at worship. 2. Sending home links to Vibrant Faith@Home. 3. FaithTalk Cards, and 4. Blessing Bowls. (See Appendix 1)
- Explore ways to involve adults who do not have school-aged children in the home. (See Appendix 2 for the Optional Milestone Focus.)
- Expand this milestone to invite people from the community as well as members of the congregation.

## Planning Helps

# Four Keys

## FOUR KEYS For Practicing Faith

1. Caring Conversations
2. Devotions
3. Service
4. Rituals and Traditions

### + Cross+Generational Event

Begin the session with an introduction that emphasizes the importance of learning for everyone, including the students beginning another year at school. Acknowledge that all people are beginning their fall schedules.

#### Preparation:

- Light snack of honey and crackers, and napkins
- Servers for set up and clean up
- Have some new backpacks available as gifts to children in the local community. Have gift-wrapping and/or gift note cards ready so that the groups can wrap the backpacks and/or write personal notes of encouragement to those students who will receive the backpacks.
- Nametags

#### Event Outline:



#### Caring Conversations

Ask people to have a discussion in their small groups. Complete these sentences:

- A favorite personal story of mine about school is...
- A funny or meaningful story about school I remember is...



#### Devotions

Read Scripture: Proverbs 9:10 (CEV)

*Respect and obey the Lord! This is the beginning of wisdom. To have understanding you must know the Holy God.*

After reading the Scripture, talk about how it may relate to learning and the new school year. Give honey and crackers to each small group, and have each person give another person a cracker with a drop of honey on it and say the following: *May the sweet taste of honey remind you of the sweetness of God's love and instruction for your life. As you continue to learn for a lifetime, remember that respecting and obeying the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*



#### Service

- Take some time to name people who have taught you in the past. What did they teach you? Thank God for this person.
- Think of a skill you have or something you know that you could teach to someone. Plan a time to do so.



#### Rituals and Traditions

Gather again in circles and close by praying together: *Dear Lord, you have blessed us with many people who have taught and mentored us in life. Bless us now as we go forth from this place with an excitement for learning and a desire to use our skill and knowledge to care for people and all creation. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Bless one another before dismissing: *"May you respect and obey the Lord."*

## Worship and Blessing

Choose a time during a worship service to recognize students and their backpacks. Invite all who are students, from children to adults, with and without backpacks, to come forward for the blessing.

#### Leader:

At this time, we are delighted to invite forward those who participated in the Backpack Milestone. We encourage them and all of us to continue the faith practices of caring conversation, devotions and service to build a ritual and tradition in all our homes as a way of life. *(Distribute additional gift, if desired, for all as a physical reminder of this milestone. See Appendix 1.)*

#### Leader:

Let us pray. God of all knowledge and wisdom, these students and backpacks remind us that a new school year has begun. We pray your blessing on them and upon all students, young and old, as they begin a new year. Help them discover and develop their gifts and give them. And in your wisdom, help them use their knowledge, help them show kindness and compassion, and respect for themselves and others. We ask your blessing on teachers, school staff, and parents who care for these students. Bless these students with your support, and love. In Jesus' name, pray. Amen.

# Worship Service

An important  
ingredient...

**There are FOUR KEY faith practices that make up the lifestyle of lifelong faith formation:**

1. Caring Conversations
2. Devotions
3. Service
4. Rituals and Traditions

# Let's have a Caring Conversation ...

Complete this sentence:

If I had an extra hour today, I would.....

# Four Keys

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2. Devotions
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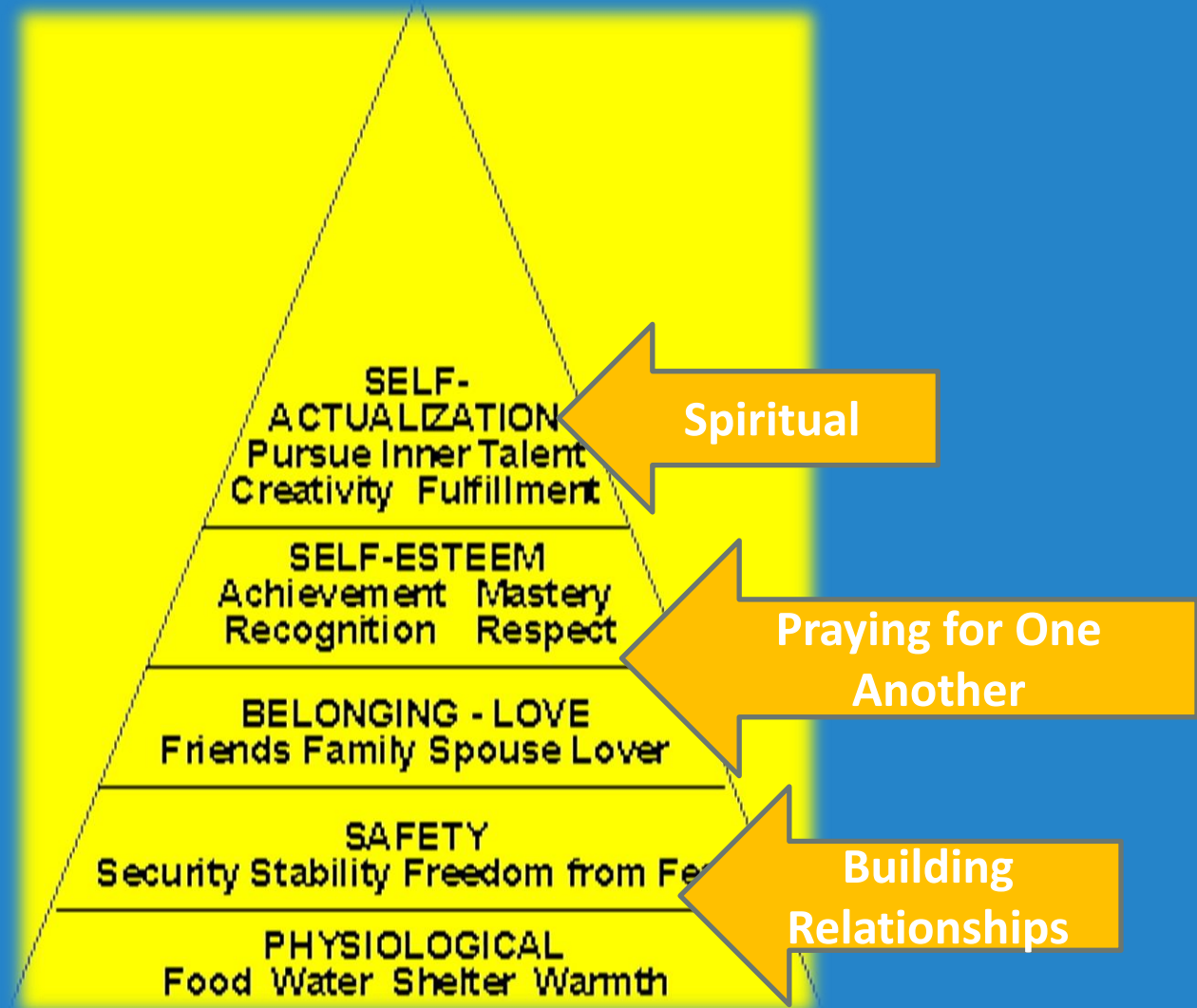
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# Worship Service

# Maslow Hierarchy of Needs



For the Home

Four Keys

## Milestone for Small Groups or Home

There are times when celebrating a milestone can be done in a small group setting or more intimately in homes. Take time to enjoy a meal or dessert together and to invite conversation with the following outline. You may also wish to use portions of a Milestone for Small Groups or Home Generational Event found in this Backpack Milestone.

### Caring Conversations

Begin with conversation:

- One of the highlights of the summer was \_\_\_\_\_.
- Now that summer is over, I can't wait for \_\_\_\_\_.

### Devotions

Read Deuteronomy 7:11 (CEV)

*So be sure to obey his laws and teachings I am giving you today.*

God made promises to our ancestors. He loves us and is with us always. He gave them and us a commandment to keep his words in our hearts and recite them to our children. In school, we don't have commandments. We have rules.

- What rules do you have in your school?
- What happens if you break the rules?

### Service

Our lives are filled with learning. We learn through many social contacts. We learn at school, in the home, in the congregation, on the job, through various media, and in the community.

- Make a commitment in the next month to be of service by helping someone else learn.
- Be a "book buddy" at school or help somebody learn how to run a computer program at work or develop a skill with a tool.

### Rituals and Traditions

Prayer:

*Lord, you have blessed us to be a blessing to others and grow in wisdom. Help our lives to reflect your grace and will as we serve you. We ask this in your name. Amen.*

Bless one another: "May you obey His laws and teachings."

Blessings in home and congregation with intention to do outreach

### 4 Key Faith Practices Mat



Place a candle in the center

Place a blessing bowl in the center



Add a milestone to the bowl to encourage caring conversations





# Backpack Milestone Follow Up

*Encouraging a time to check in*

*An important step after role modeling the Four Keys in a cross-generational or small group setting is to bless and equip families to continue practicing faith by using the Four Keys in their homes.*

*Approximately one month after the initial event, bring students and families back together for a follow up to continue building relationships and facilitating the Four Keys as an intentional step to encourage faith traditions in the congregation and at home.*

Four Keys

## Caring Conversations

After school has begun, gather once more for a special time. Begin with conversation:

- My favorite part of the school day is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Something I like about my teacher is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Something I look forward to in school this year is \_\_\_\_\_.

## Devotions

Read Luke 2:52 (CEV)

*Jesus became wise, and he grew strong. God was pleased with him and so were the people.*

- Jesus became wise and strong. How do you become wise and strong?

## Service

- Talk about children who may not have backpacks, lunch money, and school supplies. Go together as a family or group and buy supplies and donate to a local shelter.
- Pray for children who do not have the benefit of an education that they find a means to grow in their knowledge and faith.

## Rituals and Traditions

Pray together:

*Dear God of knowledge and wisdom, as we are given the opportunity at school to learn something new each day, we ask for your blessing. Help us to develop and grow the gifts you have given us. Remind us that wherever we go, you are always with us. Amen.*

Bless one another by making the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads and say, "Jesus goes with you wherever you go."

Reinforcing

# Milestones Ministry Frame



## Appendix & Gift Ideas

Appendix



### 5 FIVE PRINCIPLES

for living and passing on faith

1. Faith is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit through personal trusted relationships — often in our own homes.
2. The church is a living partnership between the ministry of the congregation and 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 Christian children and youth, we need Christian adults.

### 4 FOUR KEYS

for practicing faith

1. Caring Conversations
2. Disciples
3. Service
4. Rituals and Traditions

### 3 THREE CHARACTERISTICS

for Christians

1. Authentic
2. Available
3. Affirming



## Appendix 1 - Backpack

Underlined  
resources  
are active  
links

### *Ideas for "Gifting:"*

Blessing of the Backpack Stone – Individual stone for your blessing bowl



**Key Chains** – Search online using keywords like "custom key chains," "key chains with logo" and "personalized key chains."

**Zipper Pulls** – Search online using keywords like "zipper pull," "religious zipper pull" and "Christian zipper pull" and choose one appropriate for children/youth backpacks.

**Pen/Pencil** – Order pencils or pens with your congregation's name and phone number on them. Search online using keywords like "customized pen and pencil," "promotional pen and pencil" and "personalized pen and pencil."

### *Additional Resources for Milestones Ministry:*

For Everything a Season – Rituals are an important part of a vibrant family life. Make both the ordinary and extraordinary events in your family more intentionally sacred by honoring them with the simple blessing rituals featured in this book. This wonderful resource provides you with a blessing for life's most meaningful moments!

Blessing Bowl and Mat for Meaningful Moments – This beautiful, handcrafted bowl not only adds a lovely decorative touch to any home, but holds special meaning to the family that owns it. Milestones Blessing Bowls are designed to remind us of those meaningful moments that make up our lives.

Blessing Bowl for Congregational Milestones – The Congregational Milestones Blessing Bowl is a great way to celebrate each important milestone in the congregation. The hand-painted stones help visually remind congregations of the significance of a child's faith milestones, such as baptism, entering Sunday school, first communion, confirmation, graduation and pre-marriage.

Blessing Bowl – Use this bowl to place each stone as the special life event happens

Individual Milestones – A faith milestone is a marker along life's journey that says, "This is something important and God is here, too." Marking a milestone is a biblically-based spiritual practice in both home and congregation that helps all generations recognize God's presence in all of life.

Taking Faith Home Bulletin Inserts – Spark interesting conversations using this lectionary-based Four Keys tool for the home.

Taking God's Story Home Bulletin Inserts – Following the narrative lectionary, this resource takes you through the stories of the Bible.

Four Keys Mat – Let this Four Keys Mat adorn your table with a candle or blessing bowl as you engage in caring conversations, household devotions, ideas and stories for serving and create meaningful rituals and traditions.

**Four Keys Resources** – Caring Conversations Devotions Service Rituals and Traditions



Visit Vibrant Faith@Home for faith activities for all ages and stages! [www.vibrantfaithathome.org](http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org)

Resources

Gifting



## + Appendix 2 - Backpack

### *Optional Milestone Focus:*

In addition to offering a blessing to classroom students, you may wish to expand the Blessing of the Backpacks Milestone celebration to honor all people with daily routines. Let this milestone opportunity be an invitation to anyone who wishes to begin the fall season by having his or her daily life activities blessed by the triune God. This could also be a time to encourage adults to engage in the routine of studying the Bible. The first part of the blessing could focus on classroom students beginning a year of study. The next part could reach out to all others. Nonstudents could bring their briefcases, computer bags, tool belts, Bibles, kitchen aprons, gardening tools, calculators, or whatever it is they identify as a part of their daily lives. Including physical items (like backpacks or gardening tools) will help make the moment memorable. For those who come without anything in hand, you could make and present a simple certificate that acknowledges their participation in the Blessing of the Backpacks Sunday. Be sure to buy enough of the gift item for these participants, too.

### *Sample Bulletin Insert:*

*(Cut and paste this to use in bulletins and emails, or to promote the event on your congregation's Facebook page and website)*

Another fall is approaching. It is a time for students to return to the classroom and for other fall schedules to resume. [Name the congregation] will be having a Blessing of the Backpacks Milestone celebration on [date]. We are asking that all students come with backpacks or another kind of school bag. The Blessing of the Backpacks Milestone will require students, parents, and other caregivers to be present for recognition and for prayers.

Every parent wants his or her child to have all the advantages possible for a good education. This year, that includes a blessing. Since not all students have backpacks, we are asking you to consider purchasing an extra backpack, or contribute money for one, so that all students who come for the Blessing of the Backpacks have one. The remaining backpacks will be delivered to centers and schools to distribute them to students who need one. Please bring your donations and drop them off in the church office, or make your financial contribution (labeled "backpacks") and place it in the offering plate at worship. Thank you!



Options

Customizable  
Invitations

Briefcases  
Toolboxes

# For Everything A Season



**75** BLESSINGS FOR LIFE'S MILESTONES

# Blessing for a New Home

**PREPARATION** Invite family and friends to your new home. Place a small candle in each room to be blessed and carry a lit candle with you. Mark the following verses in your Bible for easy reference: Proverbs 24:3; Psalm 121:8; John 13:34; Psalm 145:15-16; Psalm 4:8; Isaiah 32:18. Add hymns or songs if you like.

If you are leading this blessing in someone else's house, change pronouns when necessary.

## WELCOME

*For everything there is a season,  
and a time for every matter under heaven.*  
Welcome to this time for blessing our home.

## RITUAL ACTION

(Gather outside, if possible.) Read Proverbs 24:3.

Let us pray: O God, as candles bring light to this home, so enable (home owners) to be your light in this neighborhood.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Light the candle and say, Christ is present!

(Move to the entrance.)

Read Psalm 121:8. Let us pray: Defender God, protect and guide those of us who live here; our going out and our coming in; and let us share the hospitality of this home with all who visit, that those who enter may know your love and peace. Amen

Light the candle and say, Christ is present!

(Move to the family or living room.)

Read John 13:34. Let us pray: Giver of joy and love, bless all who share this room that through you we may be bound together in a community of love. Amen

Light the candle and say, Christ is present!

(Move to the kitchen/dining room.)

Read Psalm 145:15-16. Let us pray: Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth, for you give us food and drink to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad. Help us to be grateful for all your mercies and mindful of the needs of others. Amen

Light the candle and say, Christ is present!

(Move to the bedrooms.)

Read Psalm 4:8. Let us pray: Lord, you provide rest for the weary and renewal for our bodies and spirits. Bless our times of rest that we might be refreshed and energized for your service. Amen

Light the candle and say, Christ is present!

(Return to the family or living room.)

Read Isaiah 32:18. Let us pray: O God, we pray you will bless this home and bless (names) with your gracious presence.

Let your love be our inspiration, your wisdom our guide, your truth our light, and your peace our benediction, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Join hands and pray the Lord's Prayer (p. 84).



## BLESSING

May the Lord watch over us as we go out and come in now and forever. Amen

# How would I use this devotion?

APRIL 19, 2015  
THIRD SUNDAY  
OF EASTER

taking<sup>t</sup>  
faith  
home

The risen Jesus sends us out to witness for him.

## DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These readings are related to the Lectionary readings for this Sunday.  
We invite you to take time each day to read the assigned Bible passages.

Sunday	Luke 24:36b-48	Witnesses of these things
Monday	Acts 1:1-8	You will be my witnesses
Tuesday	Acts 5:17-32	The apostles share the message of new life
Wednesday	Acts 10:34-43	The witness of the apostles
Thursday	Acts 13:13-31, 38-39	Paul's proclamation in Antioch
Friday	Acts 18:1-11	Paul gives witness in Corinth
Saturday	Psalms 150	Praise the Lord
Sunday	John 10:11-18	The Good Shepherd

## SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

You killed the one who gives life. But God raised him from the dead.  
We are witnesses of this. Acts 3:15

### SAY, PRAY AND BLESS:

#### A Prayer for the Week:

Lord Jesus, please open our minds to understand the Scriptures, and our mouths to speak of you. Amen. (Luke 24:45,48)

#### Mealtime Prayer:

God bless our food, God guide our ways, God give us strength to declare your praise. Amen.

#### A Blessing to Give:

May the Lord Jesus give you peace, faith, and power to tell others about him. Amen.



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Written by Pr. Greg Priebbenow.

APRIL 19, 2015  
THIRD SUNDAY  
OF EASTER

taking<sup>t</sup>  
faith  
home

## CARING CONVERSATIONS

Discuss in your household or small group:

- Who first told you about Jesus? Who and what have helped you learn about him over time?
- Jesus said that his disciples would be "witnesses" for him (Luke 24:48). What is a witness?
- In what ways are you a witness for Jesus to others? Share about your joys and your challenges in speaking to others about Jesus.

## DEVOTIONS

Jesus calls his followers to be his witnesses, to share with others their faith in him (Luke 24:46-47). In your household prayer times this week, pray for relatives, friends, or neighbors who are not Christians. Ask for God's help to share Jesus with them in word and deed.

## SERVICE

April 22 (Tuesday) is observed across the world as EARTH DAY. For Christians, Earth Day is an occasion to thank God for creation and reflect on how we might better care for what we have been given. Discuss ways in which your household can act to better protect the environment, such as using less power at home, recycling waste, planting trees and collecting litter. Commit to one act of environmental care this week.

## RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Psalms 4:8 says, "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe." The end of the day is a good time to slow down, reflect on the day, and focus on God's place at the center of our lives. Rituals that help us do this can have a powerful "witnessing" influence in our home lives. Consider incorporating these ideas into the bedtime routine:

- Share the "highs" and "lows" from the day.
- Read a Bible story or a brief Bible passage.



In addition to *Taking Faith Home*, celebrate milestones in your daily life as an effective faith formation tool. Go to: [www.milestonesministry.org](http://www.milestonesministry.org)

How realistic is it that we can equip homes for faith formation and spiritual growth?



# Debbie's 3 Tips for Leadership

Be Intentional



Set Expectations



Plan for  
Accountability

faith formation for all ages and generations



# Lifelong Faith

Home

Journal

Initiatives

Presentations

Store

Cart (0)



*LifelongFaith Associates is committed to helping congregations develop lifelong Christian faith formation for all ages and generations, increasing the capacity of leaders and communities to nurture faith growth in everyone.*

<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/>

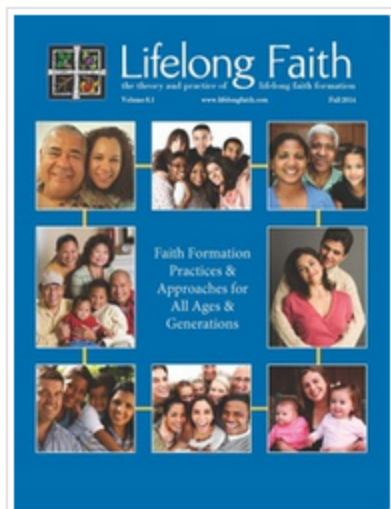
# Lifelong Faith Journal

We are providing all issues of the Lifelong Faith Journal as a free service - new issues and back issues. We want every congregation, and individual leaders and students, to have access to the Lifelong Faith Journal. We will continue to produce the Journal with the same great content we have provided for the past seven years—the best thinking and practice in faith formation across the whole life span. Each issue will continue to focus on a particular aspect of lifelong faith formation and include major articles by national experts, book reviews, and practical strategies and program models. Everyone on the Lifelong Faith mailing list will get notices when the new issue is available. Be sure to join the mailing list.

## Fall 2014 Lifelong Faith Journal

The Fall 2014 issue of the Lifelong Faith journal presents a variety of articles on "Faith Formation Practices & Approaches for All Ages & Generations." Included in this issue are the following articles.

1. Building Blocks of Faith - Laura Keeley and Robert J. Keeley
2. Children's Faith Formation at Church and Home: Birth to Age 5 - Jolene R. Departain
3. The "Identity Crisis" of the Youth Minister - Lee Yates
4. Responding to the Diversity of Today's Adults - Janet Schaeffler
5. Milestones Ministry: An Effective Model for Lifelong Faith Formation - Debbie Streicher
6. The Intergenerational Top Seven: What You Must Know and Do to Be Successful at Intergenerational Ministry - Jim Merhaut
7. Digital Media for Ministry Brief: Communications and Evangelism - Kyle Matthew Oliver
8. Story and Christian Formation: Using Movies, Video, and Music - Shannon Kelly
9. Down from the Mountaintop: Sustaining the Church Camp Experience at Home - Marlene Bogard



**Download your free copy!**



## Milestones Ministry: An Effective Model for Lifelong Faith Formation

Debbie Streicher

*A faith milestone is a marker along life's journey that says, 'This is something important and God is here, too.' It is a faith formation practice for both home and congregation that helps all generations recognize God's presence in everyday life.*

David Anderson

In theory, Sunday school is a good model to teach the Christian faith. However, in many congregations across the country, attendance is low and leadership is thirsting for a magic pill to make it all better and move back to the success of the past. We try name changes. We try time changes. We try weaving Christian education into worship services. Across denominations, we have shown concern and been in conversation about the need to revisit the way we plan and execute Christian education programs for more than a decade. *The Teaching Church* by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain and *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* by Charles Foster were written in the mid-90's. Both are relevant today and are being used by leaders to help re-evaluate the way we do faith formation.

Debbie Streicher is a member of the Milestones Ministry Team serving as a writer, developer, and coach. She also serves as President of the Christian Education Network of the ELCA. Over the past 25 years, Debbie has served in the role of volunteer and on staff for all aspects of Christian education in a congregation. She has facilitated, overseen, organized, and developed faith formation programs from infants through adults. She worked intricately with Faith Incubators resource development and has consulted and led events for congregations using these materials for over 15 years. Debbie has held volunteer leadership roles in education and evangelism at synod and national levels for 12+ years. Her vision is to involve all ages in faith formation, strengthen family relationships through spiritual growth, and empower God-given gifts to do ministry.

Lifelong Faith Fall 2014

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New Job	Teen-Adult	Jan
Empty Nest	Adult	March
Prayer	All Ages	April

All milestone (both congregational and daily life) events include the entire family, friends, and relatives. They happen in large gathering settings and in the home. We recently celebrated my husband's retirement in our home. We invited friends, family, and neighbors.

- ♦ **Naming:** This was a time to recognize my husband's retirement and transition to a new lifestyle.
- ♦ **Equipping:** We enjoyed dinner together, showed pictures of his work history, and engaged in caring conversations.
- ♦ **Blessing:** Each person present passed a stone with retirement written on it and gave a wish about my husband's retirement and gave him a blessing. We said a prayer.
- ♦ **Gifting:** The gift was the stone as a remembrance of the occasion.
- ♦ **Reinforcing:** The stone is a reminder every day of this special time. We often reflect on the stone and plan to intentionally revisit the topic of retirement and talk about how life has changed at the end of the year.

I asked our pastor how many have retired in our congregation in the past year. The answer was 15 or more. I have begun to think about those 15 and about their friends who may have retired also. What milestones can be recognized in your own congregation and community this year?

## Milestones Outside the Church Walls

It is not unusual to recognize baptism, first bibles, a mission trip, or entering Sunday school, but I invite you to think beyond these and consider how to recognize other

milestones in the lives of those in our communities.

Is there a middle or high school nearby? Is there a nursing home in the area? Is there a military base close by the church? What are the needs of these people? What would invite them into a relationship with Christ? What would make them want to give their time?

Is the church near a nursing home?

Celebrate 70, 80, and 90 year old birthdays. Go to them or invite them along with their families to come to you. Or honor and bless caregivers for those individuals. Both family and staff are caregivers. Those in their 70's, 80's, and 90's are the ones who filled our churches over the years. How can we recognize this?

Is the church near a middle school?

Celebrate birthdays for the month. Post a banner outside the church and name one day each month where you have a party for teens. Invest in a large TV and updated video games. Provide free internet service, or invite one of the high school or middle school bands or musicians to participate. Take time for a blessing and prayer. Equip families with ideas and tools to celebrate their own teen's special day in their home with a prayer and blessing.

Is the church near a military base?

Families are constantly in transition on a base. There are some leaving for deployment and others returning. Recognize both occasions and invite families and singles for a time to be together and celebrate this significant time in their lives.

## A New Venture

This past August, David Anderson and I were asked to manage Milestones Ministry ([www.milestonesministry.org](http://www.milestonesministry.org)). David's wife, Gloria, and my husband, Burt, complete the team in our new venture together. We are committed to practicing these milestones

Lifelong Faith Fall 2014

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## Faith Markers Ministry: Marking Each Child's Faith Journey

Mennonite Church

Faith Markers Ministry honors a child's steps along the pathway toward believers baptism and church membership. Children are already in relationship with God and capable of growing in faith. Faith Markers are significant for the children and youth, their families, and the church community. A ritual of blessing reminds children that they are an integral part of the faith community. Faith recognition reminds parents of their role in shaping faith in their children at home. And the church community affirms its promise to be partners in forming faith in all ages.

## Faith Milestones as a Tool to Grow Relationships Debbie Streicher

Celebrating a milestone in our lives is important. Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and the list goes on. We can all think of a time when a milestone in our life was uplifted by our families with a party where friends and relatives gathered to honor important times in our lives. We received gifts and felt loved. It is good to be surrounded by many people who care about our lives and are with us for those special times. These times in our lives bring us together in an intergenerational setting where memories are made. We seldom forget about them and often seek to gather again with the same group of people to celebrate other milestones for ourselves and for others in the group.

## Milestones of Faith: Creating Rhythms through Rites of Passage

Steven Johnson

What does faith development look like in our community from birth to when our kids go off to college and beyond? Conversations turned into ideas, then into small events and shifts, then moved into consistent programs, and eventually the whole church caught the vision for milestones.

## One Home at a Time

Jennifer Hooks

Explore the Legacy Milestones approach that Brian Haynes and Kingsland Baptist Church use to create a common path that integrates church and home in spiritual formation through a path of seven milestones.

## Through the Zone: Creating Rites of Passage in Your Church

Brad M. Griffin

What constitutes a rite of passage, and what doesn't? What is the place of rites of passage within our culture, within the church, and within the family? How can the celebration of such rites empower adolescents to transition more effectively into adulthood?

<http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/>

ange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/faith\_milestones.pdf

Use milestones as a powerful way to engage parishioners of all ages and stages of life in



## Adult / Couple



Each season--spring, summer, winter, fall--we post more than fifty new faith-forming activities and articles. Here you will find links to all activities for Adult / Couple, current and past seasons alike.

### Caring Conversation

- [Asking Questions▶](#)
- [Christmas Decisions – Bah Humbug▶](#)
- [Couples & Politics▶](#)
- [Date Night Deck of Cards▶](#)
- [Don't Tell Me Don't▶](#)
- [End of Life▶](#)
- [Fair Labor at Home▶](#)
- [Faith and Depression▶](#)
- [Fighting Fair▶](#)
- [Give Up Complaining▶](#)
- [I Do, I Do, I Won't▶](#)
- [Life without a Partner▶](#)
- [Listening▶](#)
- [Lovemaking▶](#)
- [Ordinary to Extraordinary▶](#)
- [Personality Differences▶](#)
- [Surviving a Troubled Marriage▶](#)

<http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org/>

[HOME](#)[OUR TEAM](#)[MILESTONES](#)[TAKING FAITH HOME](#)[OUTREACH](#)[COACHING](#)[STORE](#)[FAITH FORMATION IN ACTION](#)

## *75 Blessings for Life's Milestones*

**For Everything a Season** written by The Nilsen Family has been a favorite resource for congregations since 1999 and been out of print in the last year.


Connect with us:

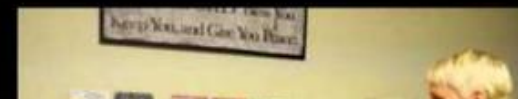


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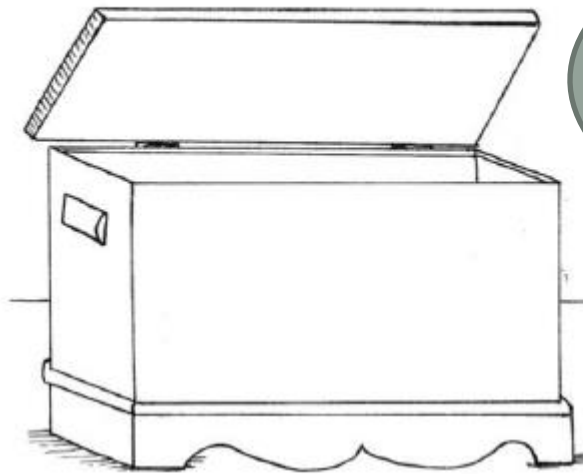
## *Milestones in Action*

Watch a video about Kristen Baltrum's Household Ministry Resource Room.

Bethlehem Lutheran Household Ministry Reso... 



[www.milestonesministry.org](http://www.milestonesministry.org)



Think of the  
milestones in  
your life...

**If this were your FaithChest, draw what  
you would put in it to remember your  
faith journey.**

**How will you use what you place in the chest to  
pass on faith to others?**



[www.milestonesministry.org](http://www.milestonesministry.org)

## Essential Settings:

- Home
- Congregation
- Digital World



## The Goal:

- Lifelong Faith Formation
- Relationships over Programs
- Be Strategic for the World, not the Congregation

# How will you.....?

Be Intentional



Set Expectations



Plan for  
Accountability

Two ears, one  
mouth....



Embracing  
opportunities to  
equip and  
empower means  
listening !

Reflect on what it means to :  
**Be speaking the language of faith in our  
congregations and in our homes.**

**Be a Christian faith role model for others.  
In whose life have you and can we make a  
difference?**

**En"theo"asm**

*It begins with us!*

*This Pwr Pt PDF can be found at*  
*[www.milestonesministry.org](http://www.milestonesministry.org)*

*Our Team*  
*Under Debbie's Bio*



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