

QUARTER 4, 2025

ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER



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GREAT LAKES
CONFERENCE
BRETHEN IN CHRIST

A quarterly resource to equip and support congregations in the Great Lakes Conference of the Brethren in Christ for the work of growing lifelong disciples within their faith family and surrounding community.

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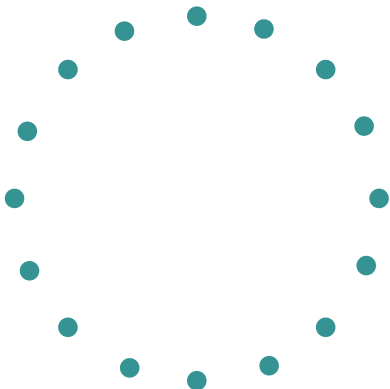
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CHILDREN & YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP

*Our country is starving for kindness.
We are desperate for joy.
We are longing for peace.*

A few years ago, a video of a woman putting on a Chewbacca mask and laughing hysterically went viral on social media within moments of being posted. All she was doing was laughing. We are desperate for Joy.

In 2016, every major news outlet shared the story of a woman who accidentally texted a lonely teenager about Thanksgiving dinner and ended up inviting him into their home to share that holiday. They are still sharing Thanksgiving dinners to this day. We are starving for kindness.

A while back, a video of a black man and a white police officer embracing and praying for peace together was viewed 1.5 million times within the first 24 hours and was shared across the world in that same time. We are longing for peace.



Our children are being raised in a time where feeding someone dinner is worthy of a national headline. Where two people praying together gets worldwide attention. Where a woman genuinely laughing is a novelty so unusual it leads to a global conversation.

As we come upon this new year, many of us are making resolutions, setting goals, and planning for the future. I have plenty of those I could make. We all do.

But what are all those things without kindness, joy, and peace? If we reach every goal, but don't experience joy, what legacy are we leaving? If we achieve every resolution, but don't know what it is to have peace, what have we really achieved? And if things actually go as planned (which we all know is a rare exception) but kindness is an afterthought, what has really been gained?

What if we gain the whole world...but lose our soul? (Mark 8:36)

Our kids need us to make these things; kindness, joy and peace, a priority.

Our resolutions need to be to show them the things that are missing in this world. Here are a few resolutions that we can offer our children and our homes that can make the biggest difference in 2026.

CHILDREN & YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP



So, ultimately, our goal for 2026 is really to bear more fruit. And the only way to do that is to abide in Christ (John 15:5).

We can't abide in politics or legislation or social justice and bear more of this fruit. We cannot abide in sports or clubs or hobbies and bear more of this fruit. We can't even abide in church or ministry or parenting and bear this fruit. We can be fully present in all these places but we should be abiding in Christ.

We can offer our children, our world, the things that make their hearts feel again. The things that go viral. The things we are desperately longing for, starving for.

Abide. Bear fruit. Be kind. Be joyful. Pursue peace. Five resolutions that could literally change the world.

Resolve to show kindness.

Actually plan for it. Find a tangible way to be kind. Write it in our planners. Put in on our calendars. Show that kindness is a normal practice in the lives of a believer. Whether that is inviting someone to share our dinner table or finding ways to serve our neighbors, make kindness a regular and consistent priority. And make sure that it is something that children can participate in actively, not just observe passively.

Celebrate with great Joy!

Not just on holidays, but in the everyday. Take the opportunity to laugh if it is offered. Stop for a second and look for joy around you. Capture it with your children and celebrate it together. Resolve to look up and out more often for the things that bring joy and share that with those around you, especially the children. Consider creating a "Joy" jar where you write down the things that have brought your family joy throughout the year and review it together monthly, taking time to remember joy.

Pursue Peace

Go after it with intensity. Seek reconciliation. "Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14). There is so much hurt in our country and in our world. There are so many opportunity we have to pursue peace. Perhaps it is reaching out to a disenfranchised people group. Perhaps it is bringing cookies to your neighbor. Whatever it is, pursue it. And invite your children into it with you.

These things; kindness, joy, peace, they all have something in common. They are listed among the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22,23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Against such things there is no law."



FAMILY FAITH FORMATION

PRACTICING GRATITUDE TOGETHER: FAMILY TRADITIONS THAT LAST BEYOND THANKSGIVING

The holiday season often arrives in a blur—filled with gatherings, to-do lists, and a steady stream of sweets and celebrations. But tucked between the rush of Thanksgiving and the start of a new year lies a beautiful opportunity: to pause and practice gratitude together as a family.

Gratitude isn't just good manners—it's a spiritual posture that reminds us who we are and who God is. When we make thankfulness a rhythm in our homes, it shapes our hearts toward joy, humility, and trust in God's goodness.

Here are a few simple ways to help gratitude take root this season.

1. The Thankful Pumpkin

One of our favorite family traditions is the Thankful Pumpkin. Place a pumpkin in the center of your dining table and invite family members to write down things they're thankful for directly on its surface. You can start at the beginning of November and add to it each day, or simply bring it out during Thanksgiving dinner.

Attach a note like this:

"We are coming upon a season of gratitude and thanksgiving as we remember all the blessings the Lord has given to us. Over the next few weeks, place this pumpkin on your dinner table and each meal time, take some time as a family to write down the blessings God has given you this past year. On Thanksgiving Day, use your Thankful Pumpkin as a centerpiece or display to express your family's gratefulness to God for all that He has done and given."

By Thanksgiving, your pumpkin becomes a beautiful visual reminder of God's faithfulness—a centerpiece full of stories and gratitude.



2. Gratitude Collage

Set up a simple art station with magazines, markers, scissors, and glue. Invite everyone to create a collage of things they're thankful for—people, experiences, moments, and even challenges that helped them grow. Display the collages through Advent or the New Year as a colorful wall of praise.



3. Mealtime Gratitude Challenge

Make gratitude part of your daily meals. Before eating, ask each person to share one thing they're thankful for that day—something big or small. You can also make it fun: assign themes like “thankful for people,” “thankful for nature,” or “thankful for surprises.”

4. Serve Together

Gratitude naturally grows when we give. Choose one way to serve as a family—deliver cookies to neighbors, volunteer at a food pantry, or write notes to church members who may be lonely this season. Serving reminds us that gratitude is best expressed through love in action.

5. A New Year's Prayer of Thanks

As the calendar turns, take time to pray together, thanking God for the ways He has been present through the past year and asking for open hearts to receive the new one. Gratitude doesn't have to end when the leftovers are gone. It's a habit that shapes hearts, strengthens faith, and reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from above.

Perhaps this year, more than in others in recent memory, I am more cognizant of the need to give thanks. However, I think something we need to consider as we are leading the next generation of citizens, is that gratitude is not limited to a spoken “thank you” or a special day.

Gratitude is a way of life; a continual living into an awareness of the blessings we have and the grace we are given each and every moment of the day.

Simply put, gratitude is a life of awe. It's a place where we are very aware of the incredible life we are given, from the air that we breathe to the food that we eat. It's more than an attitude or a platitude – it's a state of being.

INTERGENERATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



IS “ADVENTING” A WORD? IT SHOULD BE!

What is Advent?

If you know me at all, you know that Advent is probably my favorite celebration of the year. Not Christmas necessarily, but Advent, the time leading up to Christmas. The anticipation of Christ’s arrival. The celebration of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love

A few years ago, I asked a group of elementary-aged children this question. Keep in mind that these children have been “raised” in church so the terminology of “advent” was not unfamiliar to them. But the answers... oh, the answers... seriously, one of the reasons I love working with kids..

According to the kids, Advent is...

- ... when you can’t find the angel for the top of tree and you look all over the house for it
- ... a fun trip into the jungle (I think he though I meant “adventure”)
- ... when you light candles on the tree branches that fall off the tree (think Advent wreath)
- ... that thing you use to light Christmas lights
- ... the songs you sing at Christmas time

Admittedly there were some closer guesses, “countdown to Christmas” being the most popular one, but in reality, most of the kids had no idea about the heart and the wonder behind the season of Advent.

And that got me thinking? Why? I know for a fact that Advent has always been celebrated at this church. Every year on the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, candles had been lit and Hope, Peace, Joy and Love talked about. Scriptures were read and Advent vespers services were held. But somehow, the whole meaning behind the celebration of Advent was missed by the children.

So the question is, how much of what we do on Sunday still has meaning for us on Monday?

You see, lighting the candle of Joy this past Sunday doesn’t mean a whole lot to me or you (or to our kids) if we don’t talk about that joy, contemplate that joy, and celebrate that joy for the rest of the week.

Reading beautiful Scriptures of God's promises and love for us doesn't mean a whole lot if it stays inside the church walls and never makes it to our dinner table, our car ride, our community, and our job.

Singing a few hymns about Christmas won't impact our lives until we consider the words and use them to praise God on our recliner at home as much as we do our pew at church.

The reality is, if we are “doing” something at church and not “doing” that same thing the rest of the week, we are compartmentalizing our faith to a building instead of incorporating our faith into transformed lives.

And that includes us being together. If we only see one another for an hour on Sunday, how are we helping the next generation understand that “church” is not a building but a family, a community, the body of Christ.

I once asked a similar group of kids what church was. My answers ranged from “A building we go to on Sunday” to “Where God lives.” I know these are kids and “kids say the darndest things” but let's be real for a minute.

If we live lives that say “Church is a building we go to on Sunday because God is there” how else are our children to interpret our faith? What if instead we told our kids, “Church is the family of God and He is always with us so we are always in church?” Not with those words, but with our lives.

Some Ways Your Whole Church Can Advent Together

1. Caroling Night – Those beautiful hymns we sing on Sunday can be a fun way to bring generations together, whether it's walking door-to-door singing together or gathering around a bonfire to share in a seasonal celebration.

2. Festive Feast – A lot of churches already share a Christmas meal together but what if you mixed it up and encouraged multiple generations to sit at each table. Include questions on the table that they can ask each other like, “What's your favorite Christmas memory from church?” and “What do you like best about Christmas?”

3. Dinner Groups – I recently spoke to a church that has created multi-generational dinner groups that gather monthly to share a meal. Christmas would be an amazing time to kick off an ongoing gathering like this.

4. Family Scavenger Hunt – This is a fun one! Host a holiday-themed scavenger hunt around town and have all families gather back at the church for a dessert bar or hot chocolate bar hosted by the senior members of the church. ReFocus Ministry happens to have one that is currently available for FREE to download here: <https://refocusministry.gumroad.com/l/advent>

THE FINAL FOUR

ONE BOOK, ONE VIDEO, ONE WEBSITE, ONE RESOURCE

The Story as told the Church Calendar by Christ Church Anglican

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfN7ucvUx4s>

The Christian calendar tells the story of God and His people by dividing the year into two major segments. The first part tells the story of

Jesus – beginning in Advent with the anticipation of His birth and stretching all the way to Pentecost with the sending of the Holy Spirit. As we enter into this great drama of God's redemption, may we hear it again, fresh and new, and find ourselves to be more than hearers – that we might discover ourselves to be participants, because Jesus' story has become our own.

Family Vision Board

Having a vision for your life is so important. Not only does it help to provide direction, but allows you to see potential misalignment with your dreams and goals. We all have a vision for our family, places we want to go, things we want to do, experiences we want to have, the legacy we want to leave.

These blog post help families to create a vision together for the upcoming year.

<https://beyondcommitted.com/why-you-need-a-family-vision-board-and-how-to-make-one/>

<https://ledyliz.com/how-to-create-a-faith-vision-board-with-your-family/>

Becoming God's Family: Why the Church still Matters by Carmen Imes <https://seminaryhillpress.com/product/youth-ministry-that-lasts-a-lifetime-pb/>

Exploring the familial and communal identity of the church, Imes traces the thread of God's presence in the gathered community of faith across the entire Bible.

She invites readers into a vision of the church that is rooted deeply in Scripture and speaks directly to the challenges we face today. Imes reminds us of a powerful truth—God delights in the global, intergenerational family He has created.

Small Church Ministry

smallchurchministry.com

Free Resources & Ministry Tips for Volunteers & Ministry Leaders in Small Churches. Find what works in small churches for women, children, worship, youth, communications, media, outreach, leadership, and more. Check out their examples of some intergenerational Christmas activities for your church community:
<https://smallchurchministry.com/intergenerational-christmas-activities/>



Gather & Play

Who are we? B.I.C. Core Values

COMING NOVEMBER 17

GATHER & PLAY: A JOURNEY WITH JESUS - BIC CORE VALUES

*FULL CURRICULUM FOR TODDLERS, CHILDREN AND YOUTH!
WATCH EMAIL AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR LINK TO DOWNLOAD*



Training and Coaching Opportunities

DUE TO A GENEROUS SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE GREAT LAKES CONFERENCE, ALL COSTS HAVE BEEN REDUCED BY OVER 75% FROM THE ORIGINAL PRICE.

EVERYDAY DISCIPLESHIP

For parents/caregivers who desire to be intentional in the faith formation of their children, this webinar offers practices for daily discipleship at home.

\$50.00/webinar

INCLUDED:

- Unlimited access to all church members
- Personalized for your church
- Resources for the webinar and as follow-up for parents/caregivers

RECONNECT WEBINAR

ReConnect Webinar is designed for pastors and ministers interested in beginning to take steps to connect generations in ongoing spiritual formation and discipleship.

\$80.00/participant

INCLUDED:

- Groups of 4 or more
- 4 One Hour Workshops
- Resources/Handouts for during and after each workshop
- One 1/2 hour personal coaching session following webinar

PASTORAL TEAM COACHING

ReFocus coaching experiences help churches create missional communities focused on generational discipleship and spiritual formation. Through personalized mentorship, trainings, and coaching, ReFocus will help your church move into a deeper experience of community within your church family.

\$200-250 based on church size and needs



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