



By Rachel Schilling Grow Ministries Congregation Coach

In the sudden shift to close churches and move all our ministries on-line I wonder where did all the children go. Of course, we know they are at home, with the rest of us – but where is their presence in this body of Christ as we know it today?

For me, one of the greatest gifts of encouragement of a Sunday morning, is the moment when a young family arrives at church - straddling bags and toys and children, looking like it has taken them three hours just to leave the house. I just want to run and give them a hug and say, "you made it! Here you are! Here you *all* are! And what gift your presence is to me – to all of us here." I understand they may not feel that same joy - I do remember the effort required during those days with small children, but I'm sure many of us who, like me, have journeyed through the different seasons of family life can now appreciate that life together as the body of Christ is incomplete when the children are not present. Similarly we feel an aching gap, if the youth are not present, or in a gathering where the wise and experienced are absent.

For many of us adults, our reality is now watching 'church' in all its various forms, unfolding before us on our TV's or computers. We can gather on our comfortable couches, with coffee, breakfast or dinner, at a time that suits us, even wearing our pyjamas! We can come and go, even skip through parts that are long or that we don't like! All things that might in fact make church life easier with children.

But where is the child? And how are we supporting the spiritual life of our children through this difficult and strange time? We may not have our regular children's ministry options available to us but there are many other ways to grow in our faith and learn together with our children and families during this time.

As parents, pastors, ministry workers and volunteers, we want to acknowledge that life has changed significantly for everyone. And most of us are navigating our way through this strange "land" one day at a time. Our role is to support you as a family and as a church.

The following pages have some questions, thoughts and ideas to consider.

FOR FAMILIES AND HOMES



Before, during or after church

- Prioritise the space and time for your family. Remind everyone the night before and prepare what you might need in advance.
- Choose some kid's worship songs that they know to sing before and after worship.
- Set up some things in the space where you will be as a family that remind you of the sacredness of this time – a cross, a candle, a bible, some cloth in the liturgical season colour etc. Turn off any other distractions.
- Light a candle from your home altar when the service begins.
- Younger children could use the Bible App during the sermon/message, colour, create with dough or use the worship notes page (put link in)
- Create your own 'home' church bag filled with quiet books, puzzles, colouring etc.
- Bring your Bible to worship and read along with the readings – look them up before you begin, or pause to allow everyone to find the place.
- Discuss how you can regularly give an offering as if you were physically at church.
- Bake a special morning tea to eat after worship during 'fellowship' time!

During the week

- Continue with something simple each day from Growing Faith @ Home. Have it available and ready to use on your table, kitchen bench or coffee table. Use the meal time prayer, blessing or prayer.
- Write the 'verse of the week' to learn and remember. Create a prominent place in your home to put the verse: on the fridge or back of the toilet door are two places people regularly look!
- Listen to a meditative podcast. The www.wewonderpod.com is designed especially for children and families and follows the church seasons.
- Play worship music to begin and end the day.
- Watch some movies about Jesus or Bible stories on YouTube.
- Take notice of God's creation on your next family walk or bike ride. Share what you notice.
- Begin a gratitude family journal. Record each day the things you are thankful for and where you have seen God at work during that day.
- Be mindful of the blessing of this time together as a family, pause & be present to those around you. Check in with each other regularly through caring conversations. Try these:
 - On a scale of 1 (the worst) to 10 (the best), how would you rate your day? (We also say 5's are not allowed!)
 - If you could do something to make your day one point better what might it be?



FOR THE CONGREGATION



Pastors, ministry workers and volunteers:

- ✔ How you will invite people to be a part of worship prior to Sunday morning?
- ✔ How will you make connections with the worship and each family and each home?
- ✔ Where can a child or family be participants (not just consumers) of the worship time?
- ✔ Email or send in the mail the following week's [Growing Faith at Home](#), include a personal letter.
- ✔ Email families [Worship Notes](#) and encourage the children to complete during the on-line service.
- ✔ Use a conversation question from [Growing Faith at Home](#) during the service or a pre-emptive 'listen out for' question prior to the Bible reading.
- ✔ Ask families to create something and send in a photo to share within your community. For example – decorate a room ready for Pentecost in plenty of red, or have a cake baked ready to celebrate the birthday of the Church.
- ✔ Request prayers or song choices to use.
- ✔ Can parts be pre-recorded with different people to create worship that involves and includes many people from within the community?
- ✔ Have a special kid's Q and A.
- ✔ Have members of your congregation pre-record a Kids chat. You could use the [Children's Addresses](#) from Grow Ministries.
- ✔ Use a pre-recorded Kids chat like these from Colin Buchannan www.compassion.com.au/colin (Permission to use has been given.)
- ✔ Begin an intergenerational zoom catch up with 3-4 homes of various generations or have people of different generations call each other.
- ✔ Use (send out) colouring sheets from [Illustrated Ministry](#)

This list is just the beginning... what have you found that has worked? We'd love to hear about it!

